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Introduction to ELT Methodology

RIGORÓZNÍ PRÁCE

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Prohlašuji, že jsem rigorózní práci vypracoval samostatně a že jsem uvedl všechny použité prameny a literaturu

V Praze dne 14. února 2012

(I declare that the following thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Prague, 14 February 2012)

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List of abbreviations

AL – applied linguistics
ALTE – Association of Language Testers in Europe
BALLI – Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory
CA – critical age
CAH – Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLL – community language-learning
CLT – communicative language teaching
CP – critical period
CPH – Critical Period Hypothesis
EA – Error Analysis
ELT – English language teaching
ESP – English for Specific Purposes (also English for Special Purposes)
FL – foreign language
FLA – foreign language acquisition
FLT – foreign language teaching
GLL – the good language learner
GLT – the good language teacher
GTM – grammar-translation method
IL – interlanguage
L1 – first language, mother tongue
L1A – first language acquisition
L2 – second or foreign language
L2A – second or foreign language acquisition
LSM – Learner Self-Management
SL – second language
SLA – second language acquisition
TEFL – teaching English as a foreign language
TL – target language
TPR – Total Physical Response
WTC – willingness to communicate
ZPD – zone of proximal development

Introduction

Despite the many years of research of teaching practice we still do not know why it is that some universities are more successful at preparing language teachers than others. We must ask what it is that constitutes the core of effective teacher preparation. What are its components and principles? Does it help if teachers know how people actually learn languages? And are answers to this basic question actually available? Do we know? Is the acquisition of language the same as the acquisition of other subjects like maths or physics?

Teaching is a process that involves two – the teacher and the learner. Research agrees that teachers should understand that their students are unique beings who tackle the complexities of learning a foreign language and even those of regularly attending language lessons in their own idiosyncratic ways. But are novice teacher trainees aware of what these complexities are? And which ones should teacher trainers include in a teacher training course?

All of the thoughts outlined in the paragraphs above led to the idea that an introductory course for the English teacher trainees at the Department of English Language and ELT Methodology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague would be highly beneficial. A course which would introduce some of the most basic concepts of learning and language acquisition and the individuality of the language learner before the students themselves become proper teacher trainees. A course which would transfer some of the necessary aspects from the actual MA teacher-training course and make more space for other topics. And last but not least, a course which would pique the interest in applied linguistics and language teaching especially. I consider myself lucky to have been asked by doc. Mothejzíková to prepare the syllabus of such a course and make it the topic of my thesis.

The thesis takes the form of a descriptive outline of a semestral course entitled “Language-Learning Theory and Practice for ELT”. The suggested Czech title of the course is “Teorie a praxe jazykové akvizice pro učitele angličtiny (didaktická propedeutika)”. The core chapters of the thesis will provide a brief description of the individual seminars along with suggested ideas for student interaction, student presentations and references to relevant literature. The course aims to set teacher trainees on a possible introductory path leading to the understanding of the fundamental concepts of language learning. As Douglas Brown (2007) points out, language teaching can hardly be carried out effectively by teachers who are unaware of the basic concepts of language and cognition, nonverbal communication, sociolinguistics and first language acquisition, as it is the understanding of language components that significantly contributes to the way we teach a language. However much

we could extend this basic list of key points the message is clear: understanding and awareness are the key to performance.

In designing programmes for teacher trainees one must be aware of the two perspectives of viewing the importance of quality teacher-training. Not only does it guarantee quality teachers and good results for the students, but it may also guarantee a successful, life-long career for the teachers themselves. It may also shape the way the teachers teach for the whole length of their careers. Consequently, I have been deeply aware of how responsible the task of preparing a teacher training course is, and as a result I have reviewed an extensive body of literature especially in the areas of language acquisition, psychology of language learning and teaching, language teacher education and general language teaching methodology. However, due to the restricted scope of this thesis most of this extensive research has not found its way directly onto its pages. It was, nevertheless, generously drawn from during the preparation of the notes for each of the seminars as they were taught in the summer and winter terms in 2011 and will continue to affect further development and improvements of the course.

On a gender note

Whilst I am fully aware of the trends in using personal pronouns in a politically correct way, I would like to refrain from introducing artificial rules such as the student is *he* whilst the teacher is *she*. I consider such practice often rather confusing, and in my strive for clarity and concision in this work I use the pronouns *he*, *his* and *him* generically, usually to express anaphoric reference in its most concise form. This is simply for convenience sake. I mean no harm and do not intend to make any statements.

Chapter 1

Seminar 1 – An introductory overview of fundamental concepts

Aims:

- to provide an introduction to the key concepts of the whole course (**language, learning, language learning**);
- to discuss the differences between **second language acquisition** (SLA) and **foreign language learning** (FLL);
- to present the sphere of study of **applied linguistics**, and introduce basic literature (e.g. *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*);
- to discuss the concepts of **language ego** and **linguistic identity**.

Objectives:

The students gain an overview of the basic concepts introduced in the course. They learn to distinguish the differences between FLL and SLA and appreciate how it affects the interpretation of research data, and also the approaches to teaching and the development of materials for language teaching. They become acquainted with applied linguistics and its concerns. They consider the psychological effects of SLA and FLL on the development of the learner's linguistic identity.

1.1. Language

What is language? How many times have we encountered this question? How many people have tried to offer a plausible answer? Is language less or more of what they have attempted to describe? Or have they all failed? Is language truly undefinable? Laurie Bauer (2007:6) laconically states that "linguists have to define language for their own purposes", and thus – perhaps tongue in cheek – he stresses the obvious, incontrovertible fact that the idea of language is so simple and complex at the same time that a straightforward all-encompassing definition is impossible to find. We have to start from the other end, and decide what we need a definition for. Only then can we see if, to use Bauer's words again, it fits our purpose. And so, for the purpose of our course we want to see if language can be defined from the learner's perspective. And what implications existing definitions of language have for the learner.

Language is often defined simply as a system of human communication. But if we see communication as an exchange of information, then it can clearly be achieved – at least to some degree – by other modes of communication as well, including the non-verbal.

Saussure's "language is not an entity" underlines the fact that the ability to communicate by means of a language involves the knowledge of different systems (e.g. grammatical, phonological), and thus it appears best to adopt the view of the Prague School which sees language as **a system of systems** which make human communication possible. This forms one part of the definition for the foreign language (FL) learner to build on – he must develop some degree of knowledge of all of these systems. In the context of FL teaching, they are called **language forms** and they comprise vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax, writing systems, and discourse. The other part of the definition, should reflect the idea that language is a social fact – it is a tool, a means to an end. And whatever the end might be may vary depending on the learner's communicative and sociolinguistic needs. These might also include the learner's own reflection of himself as a FL speaker – a combination of how he sees himself, how he presents himself to the others, and how the others see him.

For Chomsky, language is a restricted psychological phenomenon whose creative aspect are "mysteries" which "simply lie beyond the reach of our minds, structured and organised as they are, either absolutely beyond those limits, or at so far a remove from anything we can comprehend with requisite facility that they will never be incorporated within explanatory theories intelligible to humans. (Chomsky, 1980: 136) Chomsky is concerned with a description of language, with the concept of grammaticality.

Halliday's view of language as social semiotic is far more relevant to the realm of language learning and teaching as it sees language as a system which serves social functions. Contrary to Chomsky's set of all grammatical sentences he is concerned with the expression of meaning in context. Besides, to him language is text and not just sentences, and usage dominates over grammaticality. Halliday distinguishes between the **ideational** function of language through which people cope with the external world, and the **interpersonal** function which makes communication between people possible. Language is both abstract knowledge and human behaviour.

An important view of language comes from the prominent Russian psychologist **Lev Vygotsky** who sees language as an instrument or a tool of thought, thus reflecting Kant's view of language being just one of several tools used by humans to experience the world.

In one of the most influential manuals for language teachers, Brown (2007a:6) offers a more detailed definition of language by making a list of the following components:

- "1. Language is systematic.;
2. Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.;
3. Those symbols are primarily vocal, but may also be visual.;
4. The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.;
5. Language is used for communication.;
6. Language operates in a speech community or culture.;
7. Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.;
8. Language is acquired by all people in much the same way; language and language learning both have universal characteristics."

His definition is fairly descriptive, and very much in line with the approaches of general linguistics. Whilst we may wonder why, in a teacher-training manual, he includes point 7, the other points show a significantly higher degree of relevance to language learning. Language clearly is a system functioning on many levels (e.g. phonological, lexical, syntactical) which have to be addressed by both the learner and the teacher. The symbolic nature of language puts the learner face to face with the relation between language and reality, between the symbolic and the real-life interpretations of meaning. The vocal-graphical dichotomy embraces not only the complexity of the production of speech by the learner and the mastery of different writing styles, but also the relation between the written and the spoken form. The fact that language is a social tool highlights the fact that successful communication relies, at least to a certain extent, on the understanding of the social and cultural bases of the given language community where language is interpreted by its native users, and in their hands – or rather brains and mouths, and under their pens – it also undergoes continual changes which present yet another layer of complexity for the learner. Besides its obvious implication in the realm of language acquisition and linguistic universals, the eighth point can also be seen as an expression of hope – languages have always been learnt and so they can be taught and they will be learnt by everyone, especially if we build on what we know and understand about languages and learning both theoretically and empirically.

In his discussion of these points, Brown stresses the importance of teachers' being **aware** of the meaning of the different levels of his composite definition. (I shall discuss the importance of teacher awareness in the last chapter of my thesis.) He makes a strong call for erudite, well-informed teachers who are equipped with as much technical knowledge of linguistics as possible. He makes a direct link between teachers' understanding of the components of language and the way they teach (*ibid.*, p. 7).

1.2. Applied linguistics

Stern (1991:147) makes an important distinction between linguistics and language pedagogy. Whilst general linguistics is concerned mainly with the finding of a theory of language and the tools for describing it, language pedagogy is concerned with the practical implications of teaching it. Language teaching is an applied activity, it is one of the branches of study of **applied linguistics**. Other branches of applied linguistics are any which are based on the relation between language, linguistics and practical problems, such as the theory of first and second language acquisition, bilingualism, multilingualism, lexicography, discourse analysis, pragmatics, translation, forensic linguistics and several others. Whilst applied linguistics stems from and relies on an accurate description language, it widens the scope of general linguistics by applying information from other fields, such as information theory, psychology, and sociology. It is, however, essential to bear in mind the close interrelatedness of general and applied linguistics, and the importance of general linguistics for language teaching.¹

¹ In the seminar, different views and definitions of applied linguistics by various linguists (e.g. P. Corder, Jack C. Richards, Z. Dörnyei, R. Hudson, A. Kirkpatrick, A. Burns, S. Hunston) will be presented.

1.3. Learning²

Learning is such a complex activity that attempting to define it is a formidable task, and any definition will necessarily be a gross simplification. Mayer (2002) defines learning as a process leading to a change which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning. The definition embraces some important principles – mainly that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge, and not just a result. Secondly, that the change in knowledge influences the learner's further intellectual development and behaviour. And, that it is a result of the students' interpretation of and response to their experiences. Mayer's definition, however, concentrates mainly on the cognitive aspects of learning, leaving aside the existence of social and emotional components of learning.

According to Ambrose et al. (2010:4), learning is influenced by the students' prior knowledge; by the way they organize their knowledge; by their motivation; by their acquisition and integration of component skills; by goal-directed practice and targeted feedback; by the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the learning environment; by their ability to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning.

The ultimate objective of learning is the development of the ability to transfer what has been learned in one context into another sphere of human activity. As a case study, I would like to introduce the students to the currently much discussed and developed method of instruction in Great Britain called Mantle of the Expert.³

Halliday sees an important connection between learning and language. To him, learning is a linguistic process and language is more than just a skill – it is a tool for all other learning. He defines learning as a process happening in three interconnected areas: learning language, learning content through language, and learning about language. He suggests that learners will struggle if any of these three functions is neglected.

1.3.1. Language learning

One of the most influential models of language learning has been presented by Spolsky (1989:28). It is a combination of social aspects influencing language use, learning and learning opportunities, motivation and learner modalities. Whilst we might claim the model is simplistic, it makes an important point in assigning the central role and position to motivation, which is both a result of social context and attitudes to language and learning, and a springboard for the realization of learner modalities. Given the right language opportunities, these factors then lead to the production and acquisition of language. One of the limitations of the model is that it is applicable to a greater degree to the area of SLA rather than FLA (cf. the disregard of other motivational factors than social and attitudinal ones). The diagram on the following page is a copy of Spolsky's concept.

²The various views of learning are the topic of the second seminar.

³ See www.manteloftheexpert.com

1.4. Second and foreign languages, learning and acquisition

There is a great deal of literature which does not differentiate between **SL** and **FL**. This is largely true about literature of American provenance. Sharwood-Smith (1995:7), for example, defines SL as “any language other than the first language learned by a given learner or a group of learners irrespective of the type of learning environment”. Whilst SLA and FLA certainly share a significant number of features, in many ways they are different. Within the context of the Czech learners the distinction between FL and SL is, however, more than relevant. **Second language** is not one’s mother tongue but it is the language of the community in which the learner lives (e.g. the situation of immigrants). Second language learners are permanently exposed to the TL, and if they want to have an active role in the society in which they are living, they have to make constant attempts at using it in their day-to-day lives. They can practise the TL in its most natural form, and they reap the benefits of inadvertent exposure to the language of their environment.

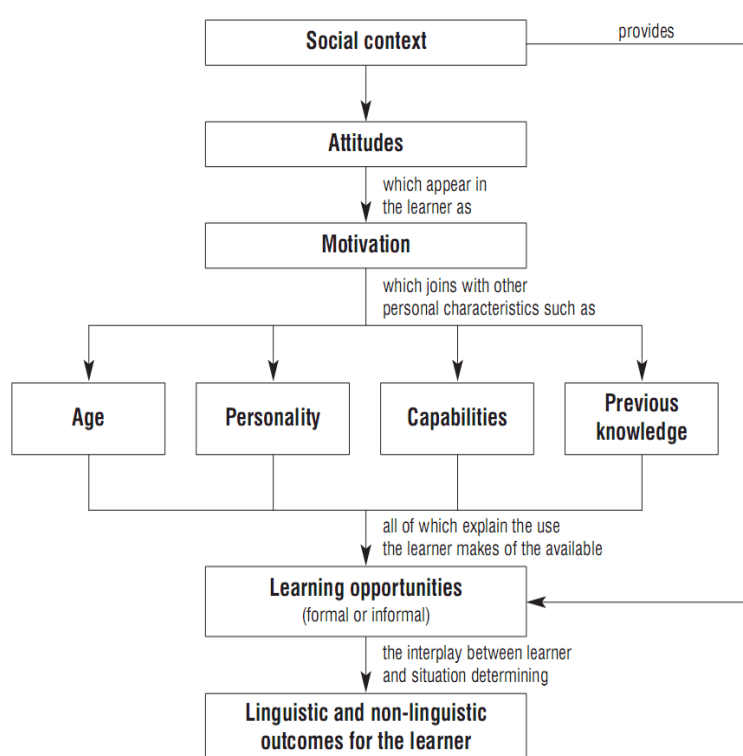


Figure 1. Spolsky's general model of language learning.

Foreign language is neither one’s mother tongue, nor is it the language of the community. Typically, it is the language which one learns in the artificial conditions of school classrooms or one’s own home. Foreign language learners do not have the same amount of exposure to the TL, neither do they need to use it for reasons of “survival”. In his Monitor Theory, Krashen makes a distinction between second language acquisition and learning. According to him, acquisition is a subconscious process, which happens much in the same way as first language acquisition, and language learning is then the intentional studying of a FL in a language classroom.

The distinction between FL and SL is highly relevant in the classroom environment. There are certain advantages of being a student in an SL classroom where the other students do not necessarily communicate in our mother tongue, and if communication is to happen, it can only be in the TL. This is ideal from the teacher's perspective as he can engage the students in group work being sure that the students will use the TL for communication. In the FL classroom students often resort to using their mother tongue as they either feel embarrassed to communicate with their peers in a FL or they want to get a message across no matter how. The teacher can, however, avail himself of the opportunity to use the L1 either for explanations, comparisons, or as a time-saving tool. But teaching in monolingual and multilingual classrooms certainly involves different approaches, decisions and considerations.

In the following chapters of my thesis, I will use both terms – the label foreign language excludes the context of SL, whilst the label second language will include both second language and foreign language.

1.5. Language ego

In *Thought and Language* Vygotsky discusses the determinative role of language in thinking, the affinity between speech and cognitive awareness. Much of our thinking happens, or at least, is mediated by language. The language we speak forms a great part of who and what we are, our language identity thus being an essential component of our identity as a whole. A question arises whether the knowledge of SL in any way influences this identity. Whether it affects the way we think and behave. And whether we perceive ourselves as different people when we use a foreign language.

These ideas were formulated for example by Wilhelm von Humboldt who suggested that the diversity of languages is not a diversity of signs and sounds, but a diversity of views of the world.⁴ It was probably this idea that gave rise to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of language relativity and linguistic determinism. Sapir and Whorf believed that the differences in which different languages capture cultural and cognitive categories influence the way people think. According to them, language entirely determines (or in the weaker version of the theory at least exercises some influence on) non-linguistic thought, and that speakers of different languages therefore think differently. Several decades later, George Lakoff observed that different languages use different cultural metaphors for similar or identical concepts and that these metaphors (e.g. *time is money*) disclose how users of these languages think differently. Current researchers (e.g. L. Boroditsky or D. Robertson) develop the arguments but are generally more careful than the original claims. Similarly, Dan Slobin in his theory "thinking for speaking" postulates that the way we perceive and reflect on reality is shaped by the language we speak, as if our L1 acted as a type of filter through which we perceive the world

But do bilingual speakers, or speakers of foreign languages assume different personalities? Do they acquire, using Slobin's term, another filter for viewing the world? Are their

⁴A clear reminiscence of Kant's view of language as one of the tools for experiencing the world.

cultural values, their behaviour or ego affected by the language they happen to be thinking in or speaking in at a given moment? Brown (2007) claims that in a second language we develop a new mode of thinking, feeling and acting – a second identity. He refers to it as **language ego**⁵. Brown believes that if the learner wants to become competent in the L2 he is forced to take on this new identity, and, he correlates a strong language ego with success in L2 learning. The difficulty lies in attaining the new ego in a foreign language, as it poses a threat to the existing, first-language ego. This thought was expressed by Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human*:

“To learn many languages fills the memory with words instead of with facts and ideas, even though in every man, memory is a vessel that can take in only a certain limited amount of content. Also, learning many languages is harmful in that it makes a man believe he is accomplished, and actually does lend a certain seductive prestige in social intercourse; it also does harm indirectly by undermining his acquisition of well-founded knowledge and his intention to earn men’s respect in an honest way. Finally, it is the axe laid to the root of any finer feeling for language within the native tongue; that is irreparably damaged and destroyed. The two peoples who produced the greatest stylists, the Greeks and the French, did not learn any foreign languages.”

However sceptical Nietzsche may have been here, he believed in the idea of a single world language of international communication. And he clearly realized that it might come at a price. That the SL learner largely benefits is beyond doubt. From his point of view, language ego might be important for his sense of identity and integration within the community of the TL – some might want to attain native-like pronunciation, others will want to maintain their “foreignness” by keeping their accents and mistakes. The ego of the FL learner might be threatened for example by the fear of making a mistake in front of the teacher or his peers. This type of anxiety is discussed in Seminar 4. No matter what the situation is, it is beyond doubt that the SL learner adopts a different way of thinking and viewing himself. He should develop an acute awareness of his identity in the SL and realize how it relates to his identity in his mother tongue. This seems to be an area which teachers should not neglect – discussions of language identity can have a positive impact on the learners’ motivation and attitude. And teachers should certainly develop a degree of empathy and sensitivity to the newly developing identities of his students.

Seminar 1 – student interaction:

1. Comment on the following quotation. “A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world.” (Raymond Williams)
2. Which factors influence FLA and SLA? In what ways are they different?
3. Describe the differences between the SL and FL classrooms.

⁵ The term was extensively used in the 1970s in the studies by Guiora, e.g. in Guiora, A., B. Beit-Hallahmi, R. Brannon, C. Dull, & T. Scovel (1972) ‘The effects of experimentally induced changes in ego states on pronunciation ability in second language: an exploratory study.’, *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 13:421-428

4. Should teachers use different language materials (e.g. textbooks) in the SL and FL classrooms?
5. How do you see the role of the L1 in the L2 classroom?
6. How do you perceive yourself as a speaker of English? Do you feel that you have a different personality in English? Try and define the role of the language ego principle in language learning. Is it in any way different for a SL learner and a FL learner?
7. Can the newly developed language ego of the L2 learner be perceived as a threat to his L1 ego, and be, in effect, an obstacle in learning? What can teachers do here to help?

Seminar 1 – student presentations: no presentations (an introductory seminar)

Seminar 1 – literature:

- Anderman, E. et al.** (2009) *Psychology of Classroom Learning*, Macmillan Reference USA
- Berns, M.** (2010) *Concise Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, Elsevier
- Brown, H. D.** (2007) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson ESL, New York
- Brown, H. D.** (2007) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Coleman, J. A. and J. Klapper** (2005) *Effective Learning and Teaching in Modern Languages*, Routledge
- Davies, A.** (2007) *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics*, Edinburgh University Press
- Field, J.** (2004) *Psycholinguistics*, Routledge
- Jordan, M.** (2004) *A Theory Construction in SLA*, John Benjamins
- Jordan, A., O. Carlile and A. Stack** (2008) *Approaches to Learning*, Open University Press
- Richards, J. S. and T. S. Rodgers** (1999) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press
- Richards, J. C. and R. Schmidt** (2010) *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Saville-Troike, M.** (2006) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press
- Slobin, D. I.** (1987) 'Thinking for speaking.' Proceedings of the 13th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, 435–444
- Stern, H. H.** (1991) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press
- Webster, J. J.** (ed.) (2007) *The Collected Works of M. A. K. Halliday*, Volumes 3 (On Language and Linguistics) and 9 (Language and Education), Continuum

Chapter 2

Seminar 2 – Learning theories

Aims:

- to map the development of the science of **learning** from the early twentieth century (the advent of behaviourism) to the latest theories of learning;
- to explain the tenets of **behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism** and **social constructivism**;
- to analyse the effect of **learning theories** on educational processes (especially the processes of language learning and teaching);
- to provide an introduction to the subsequent lecture on first and second language acquisition.

Objectives:

The students should come to understand how theories of learning shaped the formation of educational practice in the 20th century, and how they affected the development of theories of foreign and second language teaching and learning and theories of language acquisition.

Psychology, linguistics and language teaching – three concepts which are very closely related. The development of psychological theories goes hand in hand with the development of linguistics. And linguistics (at least since mid 20th century) directly affects language teaching. Hence, the novice language teacher should be acquainted with the basics of psychology so that he can understand their close interconnectedness, and so that he can attain a higher level of understanding of why at certain periods language teaching followed certain trends, how we critically review these trends and how, even decades later, we can eclectically apply some of their findings.

2.1. Behaviourism

It would be impossible to start any discussion of learning without mentioning **behaviourism**. Its roots might be traced as far back as Aristotle, who in his essay *On Memory and Reminiscence* explains associations between concepts (e.g. lightning and thunder) and considers repetition an essential component of learning. It then developed through centuries into one of the most influential psychological theories in history, later

to be eclipsed by cognitivism but nevertheless providing both theories and practical applications whose effect is still felt today in general learning and language learning likewise.

Behaviourism dwells on the principle of stimulus and response – through experience, learning leads to permanent changes in behaviour. In other words, learning is a process of habit formation. Behaviourists propose that learning does not occur if there are no observable changes present. Consciousness or any internal mental states are therefore left aside. This affected behaviourists studying SLA, who, consequently, concentrated on the observable in language: language produced by the learner. Here they analysed two key aspects: habits and errors. The effect on language learning (which is seen as a mechanical process) and teaching was profound, and behaviourism laid foundations for whole schools of teaching (such as the Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, Silent Way, and Situational Language Teaching) and learning techniques (e.g. rote learning, exercises based on the stimulus-response principle, imitation practice etc.) which could be described as language-centred methods. Later research showed that habit formation exercises may impede the instinctive, creative production of language and are not always conducive to intrinsically oriented language learning. Whilst many more counterarguments (some of which will be discussed in the lecture, e.g. the concept of standardized knowledge) can be found¹, there can be no doubt that behavioural processes form the very foundations of learning experience. A thorough discussion of the theory must be provided for teacher trainees so that they realize its merits and avoid its pitfalls in their teaching careers. One of the main reservations, which should be borne in mind, is the fact that behaviourism ignores learner modalities, it treats each learner in the same way, and assumes that if everyone is given the same conditions learning will follow the same pattern.

At the same time there are positive aspects in the process of behaviour modification – positive reinforcement (rewarding) plays an important role in language learning and especially younger learners and teenagers respond very well to being praised. Another behaviourist concept directly applicable to language learning is imitation, which makes the basis of many classroom tasks and which is particularly effective in the acquisition of SL pragmatics.

Many learning techniques were tested and developed by Hermann Ebbinghaus, especially his experiments with rote-learning and retention which are directly applicable to vocabulary learning. Ebbinghaus discovered that the difficulty of memorization of lists of

¹One of the effects of the behaviouristic emphasis on analysing the observable behaviour is the application of standardized tests, which are used as if learning could be measured, as if every skill had a gauge attached to it which could tell instantly how much of the tested skill the learner possesses, whilst ignoring the deeper levels and effects of knowledge on behaviour which cannot be directly observed (such as critical thinking and problem solving). As for languages, the concept of the observable led Skinner to dismiss the distinction between langue and parole. He called “langue” unscientific as it was not observable. On the contrary, the only aspect that was observable was “parole”, and so Skinner promptly rejected the idea of any underlying system.

vocabulary sharply increases with the length of the list (this contributed to later studies which tried to determine how many lexical items can realistically be acquired within a teaching unit). He noticed that words at the beginning and at the end of the list are more readily recalled and that prior learning makes relearning more effective. Many of these principles are truly behaviourist and they still shape our understanding of memorization and learning techniques.

Most importantly, behaviourism developed our understanding of how the individual learner acquires knowledge. And this paved the road for socio-educational theories which explore learning within larger groups of learners with all their social implications.

2.2. Cognitivism

The development of behaviourism in the first half of the 20th century led to a realization that conditioning involves elements of cognition. The 1960s saw a renaissance of interest in internal mental processes. Whilst behaviourism concentrated on the external manifestation of acquired behaviour, **cognitivism**, whose rise was spurred by the development of experimental psychology, saw the importance of both internal and external behaviours. Cognitivism is the study of the mind in the process of learning, remembering and cognitive processing. Some of its most significant developments include the recognition of the multi-dimensionality of human intelligence, the determinative effect of prior knowledge on what is going to be learned in the future², and the role of metacognition (the learner's awareness and understanding of his own cognitive processes). In its study of the human memory it is very close to neurosciences. Cognitivism has been frequently criticized for trying to measure the unmeasurable, for attaching too much meaning to computational data, and for reducing mental functions to information processing models.

The implications of cognitivism on language teaching can be most clearly seen in the existence of techniques which reflect multiple intelligencies, the attention to learner styles and learning strategies. Desuggestopedia, for example, tries to present information along different sensory modes to enable dual encoding, whilst trying to reduce distractions. The attention that cognitivism has paid to memory has led to the development of useful teaching and learning strategies which encourage learning and remembering.

2.3. Constructivism and social constructivism

Cognitivism studies how information is processed. **Constructivism** studies how people use information to develop knowledge and construct new meaning, and it maintains that all

²The importance of prior knowledge was not an entirely new idea. We find it in the work of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who held that true knowledge is gained from experience, from the awareness of past actions and their consequences. This is essentially a behaviourist view similar to stimulus and response but its implication for learning is directly linked to constructivist learning theories. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) and his followers stressed the important role in learning of prior knowledge consisting of mental states or ideas (Vorstellungen); new ideas are learned by relating them to already existing mental states by a process of "apperception".

learners process information in their own way based on what they already know. Learning is therefore seen as an active process, knowledge is not just passively received, it is constructed.

Von Glasersfeld (1995) states that “Constructivism does not claim to have made earth-shaking inventions in the area of education; it merely claims to provide a solid conceptual basis for some of the things that, until now, inspired teachers had to do without theoretical foundation.” Constructivism is primarily a theory of learning, rather than a method of teaching. It is based on such concepts as individual learning styles, learners’ strengths and learners’ intelligencies. It is intensely learner-centred, which applies to all of the many existing variations of constructivism. In this, and in the belief that learning depends on connecting new information with prior knowledge and experience, it shares its foundations with cognitivism, to which it adds the dimension of social interaction. Constructivists believe that the sharing of ideas, discussion and feedback in the community of learners (formerly a class of students) are potent components of learning. The teacher provides hints, which is a process called *scaffolding*, and rather than being an instructor, he is a *facilitator* who is a cognitive guide of the student learning rather than the transmitter of knowledge.

The theory of social constructivism comes from the work of the eminent Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky whose famous “What the child can do in co-operation today, he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it: it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions.” summarizes his influential theory of the **zone of proximal development** (ZPD). The theory is based on the realisation that there are always some skills accessible to the learner (they are within the ZPD) and some for which the learner is not prepared or ready yet. The effective teacher ensures that his students are presented with tasks and information within the ZPD as this is the area where learning happens. It was Vygotsky who coined the name and the concept of **scaffolding**. It sees learning as a series of steps where every new step is a preparation for subsequent steps and enables the learner to reach a new stage in learning. The teacher facilitates in the process by providing suitable hints. The following sequence is an example of scaffolding technique (adapted from Reid 2007):

- **introductory activities:** lead-in activities make new learning accessible (e.g. pre-task discussions or brainstorming in listening or reading comprehension activities);
- **recap activities:** highlighting the key points (The teacher realises that many students cannot easily identify the main points of a lesson and he can help the students in the process of identifying them.);
- **bridge-building activities:** making connections between the ideas and the content to be learnt, and between new and prior knowledge;
- **using to prevent losing:** practise and the application of acquired knowledge to encourage the development of automaticity;
- **consolidation activities:** a summary (over-learning leading to automaticity).

McGregor (2007:53) provides a useful illustration of the constructivist teaching sequence:

ORIENTATION (introduction of the context of the lesson) → ELICITATION OF IDEAS (establishing what pupils already know and what they think) → RESTRUCTURING OF IDEAS (clarification and exchange, exposure to conflict situations, construction of new ideas, evaluation) → APPLICATION OF IDEAS (considering how the new knowledge can be applied) → REVIEW.

Constructivism has attracted many critical voices saying that instructive teaching can be more efficient, as direct instruction does not necessarily prevent the student from learning and making meaning, and that the construction of knowledge can also lead to the construction of misconceptions. Others have pointed out that constructivism does not have much effect on long-term memory, and that its techniques are often very time-consuming.

In the last lecture of this course, I present the vision of an engaging teacher, who is a model for his students both in terms of his expertise, his enthusiasm or passion for the subject and his desire to share it the best he can, and employing such methods as he sees are relevant in the given teaching situation. The teacher is an undogmatic choice-maker and decision-maker, an informed judge of the situation and it is his job to choose which method, approach or technique is appropriate at any given moment. Any reductions to the battery of his techniques are counterproductive. Last but not least, the discussion of constructivism should take into account the feelings of the learners themselves – some might not be sufficiently self-motivated to work towards constructing knowledge, others frequently expect direction from the teacher, and feel demotivated when they do not receive it in the most straightforward way directly from the teacher.

In the language classroom, the effect of constructivism can be seen for example in the techniques based on the theory of discovery learning (e.g. group work – learning from one's peers, task-based learning), the role of the learner's construction of language (Gattegno's Silent Way, Community Language Learning). In its emphasis on the students' free development it paves the way for the development of learner autonomy.

2.4. Conclusion to theories of learning

Even though a considerable amount of time in the lecture will have been spent on theories of learning, it is important to point out that theories of learning are mere attempts at trying to grasp the ungraspable, to offer plausible explanations of how people learn. It is crucial, though, to bear in mind that there are different types of learning and that to date no one single theory of learning has been discovered which would explain them all. Different theories, indeed, seem to apply in different learning situations. This is a serious finding which should alert teacher trainees to the important fact that successful, effective teaching should be pluralistic in its approach, it should involve not only cognitive factors but also emotional, participatory, social and others.

Seminar 2 – student interaction:

Task 1. Using a reflective task, students will try to identify which of the teaching and learning methods they have come into contact with are based on the behaviourist, cognitivist and structuralist approaches to learning.

Task 2. Using the following headwords arranged in random order, students will construct a comparison of instruction and construction. The exercise will be presented either as a slide or a handout. The format of the exercise easily yields itself to the use of an interactive board.

The formulation of the exercise is:

Match the following headwords to the given concepts and decide whether they are examples of instruction or construction.

Headwords: Classroom activity – Teacher’s role – Students’ role – Instructional emphasis – Concept of knowledge – Demonstration of success – Assessment – Techniques

Concepts: Accumulation of facts – Collaborator, learner – Collaborator, sometimes the expert – Communication, collaboration, information access and retrieval, expression – Criterion-referenced, portfolios and performances – Didactic – Drill and practice – Fact teller; expert – Facts, memorisation – Learner-centred, interactive – Listener, always the learner – Norm-referenced, multiple-choice items – Quality of understanding – Quantity – Relationships, inquiry and invention – Teacher-controlled – Transformation of facts

Solution:

Classroom activity: Teacher-controlled; didactic (I) – Learner-centred, interactive (C)

Teacher’s role: Fact teller; expert (I) – Collaborator, learner (C)

Students’ role: Listener, always the learner (I) – Collaborator, sometimes the expert (C)

Instructional emphasis: Facts, memorisation (I) – Relationships, inquiry and invention (C)

Concept of knowledge: Accumulation of facts (I) – Transformation of facts (C)

Demonstration of success: Quantity (I) – Quality of understanding (C)

Assessment: Norm-referenced, multiple-choice items (I) – Criterion-referenced, portfolios and performances (C)

Techniques: Drill and practice (I) – Communication, collaboration, information access and retrieval, expression (C)

Seminar 2 – student presentations:

1. The work of B. F. Skinner. (especially an evaluation of his *Verbal Behaviour*)
2. The work of Lev Vygotsky.

Seminar 2 – literature:

- Anderman, E. et al. (2009) *Psychology of Classroom Learning*, Macmillan Reference USA, pp. 97–99, 181–250, 935–939
- Buskist, W. F. and S. F. Davis (2008) *21st Century Psychology, A Reference Handbook*, SAGE Publications
- Cohen, L., L. Manion and K. Morrison (2004), *A Guide to Teaching Practice*, Routledge
- Daniels, H. (2005) *An Introduction to Vygotsky*, Routledge
- Daniels, H. (2007) *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*, Cambridge University Press
- Field, John (2004) *Psycholinguistics*, Routledge
- Freedheim, D. K. and I. B. Weiner (2003) *Handbook of Psychology*, Volumes 1 & 7, John Wiley & Sons
- von Glasersfeld, E. (1996) *Radical Constructivism: A way of Knowing and Learning*, The Falmer Press
- Glassman, W. E. and M. Hadad (2009) *Approaches to Psychology*, Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education
- Johnson, M. (2004) *A Philosophy of Second Language Acquisition*, Yale University Press
- Jordan, A., O. Carlile and A. Stack (2008) *Approaches to Learning*, Open University Press
- McGregor, D. (2007) *Developing Thinking, Developing Learning*, Open University Press
- Petty, G. (2009) *Teaching Today, A Practical Guide*, Fourth Edition, Nelson Thornes
- Piotrowski, N. A. (ed.) (2005) *Psychology Basics*, Salem Press
- Richards, G. (2009) *Psychology, The Key Concepts*, Routledge
- Salkind, N. J. (ed.) (2008) *Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology*, SAGE Publications
- Schunk, D. H. (2012) *Learning Theories An Educational Perspective, An Educational Perspective*, 6th Edition, Pearson 2012
- Strickland, B. (2001) *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology (2nd Edition)*, Gale Group
- Tennant, M. (1997) *Psychology & Adult Learning*, Routledge

Chapter 3

Seminar 3 – First language acquisition

Aims:

- to describe methods of studying **first language acquisition** (L1A);
- to describe the **stages of acquisition** of English as a mother tongue and compare it with the L1A of Czech;
- to present the features of input and exposure in L1A (child directed speech) and other **factors affecting L1A**;
- to present core **theories of L1A**.

Objectives:

The students should develop an awareness of the complexity of L1A, and the ways of studying and interpreting it.

The L2 learner is faced with a very similar communicative reality that faces a child who is learning his mother tongue – he has to acquire a language system whose individual parts such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, discourse and others form a system of tightly interlocking components rather than a mass of disjointed parts. The tasks ahead of the L1 and L2 learner seem virtually the same and whilst there are many analogies, there are also fundamental differences – mainly the learner's age and the influence of the first language. Scholars studying LA have spent much effort on trying to compare first language acquisition with foreign LA and SLA and their findings have had a powerful effect on the way foreign languages are taught. Thus they are of immediate relevance to the topic of this course.

3.1. First language acquisition theories

3.1.1. Behaviourism and first language acquisition theories

Early theories of first language acquisition (e.g. Tiedemann, Gouin) were not built on systematic observation of the development of child language. This was precisely the area on which later researchers concentrated. The first modern theories were **behaviourist** – they were based on perceptible manifestations of linguistic behaviour, and maintained that L1A happens through imitation and habit formation. The most notable example of a behaviourist theory of L1 acquisition was provided by Skinner in his *Verbal Behaviour* (1957). It is a theory based on conditioning and reinforcement – if a child makes an

utterance (called operant) which leads to the attainment of a goal (e.g. "Mummy, come." and mummy does come), it is reinforced, and through repetitive use conditioned. Skinner called this process **operant conditioning**. Chomsky, amongst others, pointed out that children, however, regularly make utterances which contain language they have not heard.

3.1.2. Nativist approach and L1A

Cognitive psychology brought an entirely new perspective – one based on the presumption of language or at least some of its components being innate, biologically determined. This approach is called **nativist**, and its main proponent was Chomsky with his *language acquisition device*. The basic idea of humans being born with a certain linguistic predisposition can be traced throughout history as far as Socrates. Nativist theory gave rise to Chomsky's theory called **Universal Grammar** which tries to explain language acquisition as a general function of the human brain which is not specific to any particular language but has foundations in linguistic universals – linguistic features which are shared by all languages. This is an attractive theory which continually draws a lot of attention and criticism.

3.1.3. Connectionism and emergentism

The idea behind the **parallel distributed processing** approach is that the human brain is capable of simultaneously processing information of different importance and on different levels of attention. Owing to this faculty, the brain of a child processes the language it comes into contact with on different levels. As a result, many connections in the brain are made. This approach gave rise to **connectionism** (neural network approaches), which posits that the brain of a child forms vast numbers of synaptic connections which are strengthened or weakened by repeated experience. The most recent continuation of this perspective is called **emergentism**. It holds that "the complexity of language emerges from relatively simple developmental process being exposed to a massive and complex environment. The interactions that constitute language are associations, billions of connections, which co-exist within the neural system as organisms co-exist within an ecosystem. And systematicities emerge as a result of their interactions and constraints." (N. Ellis, cited in Brown, 2007, p. 32).

3.1.4. The influence of L1A theories on FL learning and teaching

There are many theories of first language acquisition but the whole process in its immense complexity will probably never be fully understood. Can this scanty understanding have any practical implications for language teaching? In the past there have been several attempts at basing teaching methods on L1A findings. Gouin and his series method, the Berlitz method, the Audio-Lingual Method are just a few examples. Most recently, it is the communicative method whose teaching principle is based on the understanding that a child does not learn only under parental instruction and example but also through interaction. The weakness of these methods is in assuming that second language learning and first language learning are ruled by virtually the same principles. The rest of the course will show that the second or foreign language learner is in a markedly different situation from that of a child acquiring its mother tongue. Whilst L2A is not entirely unlike L1A there are significant differences. And understanding the difference between acquiring a first

language and acquiring a second language is a condition for understanding L2A (Baker 2009).

3.2. The stages of L1A

We have now discussed some of the most influential theories of L1A. These theories try to unveil the rather mysterious nature of what happens inside the human brain whilst it has to cope with the acquisition and development of the specifically human ability to use language – they make an attempt at explaining L1A. But can this process be described simply as it unfolds? How does it actually manifest in children? Let us now look at what is perfectly observable and has been documented by both professional linguists and amateur-linguist parents, the stages of L1A. For it is in stages that first language acquisition happens. What is especially noteworthy about this process is the universality of L1A, the fact that children in various countries acquire their different native tongues in similar stages, encountering similar problems and landmarks.

It is highly probable, if somewhat hard to prove, that L1A might start well before birth. The development of hearing is completed by the third trimester of gestation, a period when the fetus starts responding to noise, and especially to the voice of its mother. When the child is born, it soon becomes apparent that it responds to language more than to any other sounds. During the first few months the baby has to set the phonemic inventory, a process we could easily label tuning the ears. The baby, who is initially, capable of distinguishing many more different phonemic qualities than older children or adults, filters out those which are not part of its language (or languages in case of bilingual children). Thus, it develops from an individual who can acquire any first language that it will come into contact with, into an individual with a fixed linguistic identity.

Then speech begins to emerge. First of all, in the shape of **cooing** and **babbling**, which are actually accepted technical terms. Cooing relies on the production of vowels which usually have different quality to that of the corresponding native ones. The first ones to emerge are usually [i] and [u]. In babbling, some consonants (b, g, d, m) are added, more vowels, and also various intonation patterns. All this happens well by the end of the first year, a time of prolific sound experimentation and imitation. As for the ages given here, they are all of course very approximate as there is much variation between different children.

In the following six months there follows a period of **“one-word” utterances**. These single-item units are often called holophrastic as their meaning often stretches well beyond the scope of a single word, for which reason it is more correct to refer to these utterance as single-unit or single-item rather than one-word. The utterance “milk” could thus mean a number of things from mere labelling to expressing desire to quench thirst or satisfy hunger. A stage of “two-word” utterance then follows. “Jakey milk” meaning perhaps “Jacob wants some milk” or “That is Jacob’s milk”. This is also a period of extensive vocabulary acquisition which will continue for the years to come at an amazing rate of four to eight words a day on average. At the same time, we begin to notice the growing syntactical awareness in the child – English children will start their utterances with a subject, speakers of inflectional languages will start enlarging their inflectional armoury.

Utterances are growing in length, but some elements of what would constitute a complete sentence might be missing. We speak of telegraphic speech. Whilst we could argue whether the utterance “Jakey give mummy kiss.” means “Jakey wants to give mummy a kiss.” or “Jakey is going to give mummy a kiss.” we mustn’t fail to notice the impeccable word order – SVOiOa. If the term *pre-sentence* did not have such strong connotations with legal English, I think it would be a very appropriate label here. For these utterances are syntactic and the emergence of fully furnished sentence structures is imminent. This is not to say that the child will not make slips or errors, but these often get corrected by the parent who does a lot of repeating of what the child said but substituting the correct forms for the incorrect ones. This provides further exposure to the language and reinforces correctness.

As for the acquisition of inflectional forms in English, the *-ing* form is the first to emerge, with the plural *-s* ending being the runner up. The acquisition of the rules of grammar is characterised by much **overgeneralization** as the child tries to apply the acquired grammar rules to forms which behave differently in the language, producing words like *mouses* and *womans*. Yet, the child is a grammarian par excellence in recognizing different word classes – it will consistently attach the plural ending only to nouns and not use it as a marker of plurality with verbs. In the same way it perceives the difference between nouns and verbs, using the *-ing* form only with the latter. Overgeneralization is most clearly observable in the use of the regular past tense ending *-ed* with irregular verbs. This will mark the child’s speech for some years to come but with decreasing frequency. It is also not unusual for the child to add the past ending to an irregular past form, producing *knewed* (!) or *wented*. This is commonly (eg. Yule 2010) used as a counterargument against theories which believe that L1A is merely a process of imitation.

Besides overgeneralization, another typical feature is **overextension**, which is characterized by the child using one word to denote several objects which share a common feature. Thus the child starts with a limited number of words which refer to a multitude of objects, and as it acquires larger vocabulary it uses more specific labels. Interestingly, however, the same child will passively recognize words it hears and attach them to the correct object. Overextension thus stretches mainly to active speech. The opposite – a process called **underextension** – happens too, with the child failing to apply a general label to more than just one specific object.

The age of three years marks an important milestone – most children start producing complex sentences, and relative clauses begin to emerge as well. At this age more so than before, children speak the same version of child language – despite the fact that they have not been taught it, they use a language whose rules are fairly uniform.

Growing older brings about advances in proficiency, fluency and accuracy. But the gap between more and less proficient children begins to widen. As they enter school, some children have much more developed linguistic skills and general language awareness than others. This might be partly due to some innate language learning ability, and partly to the type of language input the children have had. Let us now look at which external factors play a role in L1A, and what type of input the child encounters.

3.3. Who are the 'teachers'? The role and nature of input in L1A

When adults talk to little children they use a specific register which is sometimes called motherese or perhaps more appropriately – as other adults speak to children as well – **child directed speech**. It is characterized by clearer and slower delivery, emphasized intonation and a higher pitch as compared to a speech addressed to an adult. There appears to be less variance in vowel quality and clearer boundaries between words and phrases. Whilst these characteristics have not been shown to be instrumental in L1A, babies clearly seem to be attuned to motherese – they even prefer a foreign motherese to an adult version of their native tongue. There are communicative strategies that adults employ when talking to babies. They attach labels to the surrounding objects, they repeat words and expand on them gradually building up the child's lexical and syntactic structures.

Much research has been carried out as to what type of input seems to be more effective. Contrary to expectation and popular belief, children develop better language skills if they encounter lexically rich language rather than simple. Book-reading has been found to be more efficient than mere playing, as richer language is used. At the same time, children should not really be taught language – they should simply be provided with a lot of input and opportunity for interaction. Correcting children has been found rather ineffective with children who are corrected failing to produce correct utterances consistently. In fact, for motherese, there seems to be only one strategy which is undoubtedly conducive to L1A: providing the child with a wealth of interactive experience. In the following chapter we will explore the implications of L1A on L2A theories, L2 learning and teaching.

Seminar 3 – student interaction

1. Explain the effect of behaviourism on L1A theories. How did further development in the field of psychology affect L1A theories?
2. Do you believe that we have an innate capacity for language? Why?
3. Describe the prerequisites for L1A.
4. Give examples of overgeneralization and overextension as apparent in the developing speech of Czech or English children.
5. Why do overextension and overgeneralization occur, and how do they disappear? Do overextension and overgeneralization occur in the speech of adults? How are the two concepts related to SLA?
6. Which parts of L1A theories are applicable for FLT?

Seminar 3 – student presentations:

1. The story of the feral child Genie and what it tells us about first language acquisition
recommended sources for presentation: a documentary film *The Secret of the Wild Child*
2. First language acquisition in Czech
recommended sources for presentation:
Kutálková (2005) *Vývoj dětské řeči krok za krokem*, Grada, Praha
Ohnesorg, K. (1991) *Naše dítě se učí mluvit*, SPN Praha

Seminar 3 – literature:

- Bruner, J.** (1983) *Child's Talk, Learning to Use Language*, Oxford University Press
- Clark, E. V.** (2009) *First Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press
- Cattell, Ray** (2007) *Children's Language, Consensus and Controversy*, Continuum
- Fernandez, E. M. and H. Smith Cairns** (2010) *Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics*, Wiley-Blackwell
- Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker** (2008) *Second Language Acquisition*, Routledge
- Guasti, M. T.** (2002) *Language Acquisition, The Growth of Grammar*, The MIT Press
- Hirsch-Pasek, K. and R. Michnick Golinkoff** (eds.) (2006) *Action Meets Word, How Children Learn Verbs*, Oxford University Press
- Ingram, D.** (1989) *First Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press
- Karmiloff, K. and A. Karmiloff-Smith** (2002) *Pathways to Language, From Fetus to Adolescent*, Harvard University Press
- Lightbown, P. M. and N. Spada** (2006) *How Languages are Learned (Third Edition)*, Oxford University Press
- Lust, B.** (2006) *Child Language, Acquisition and Growth*, Cambridge University Press
- O'Grady, W.** (2005) *How Children Learn Language*, Cambridge University Press
- Peccei, J. S.** (2006) *Child Language*, Routledge
- Traxler, M. J. and M. A. Gernsbacher** (eds.) (2006) *Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, Elsevier
- Yule, G.** (2010) *The Study of Language*, Cambridge University Press

Chapter 4

Seminar 4 – Second language acquisition theories

Aims:

- to provide a brief overview of the **theories of second language acquisition (SLA)**;
- to show the influence of learning theories discussed in Seminar 2 on the development of theories of SLA;
- to introduce the concept of SLA theories founded on the principles of behaviourism (e.g. *Contrastive Analysis Theory*, *Error Analysis*, *Identity Hypothesis*), cognitivism (e.g. *Krashen's Input Hypothesis*, *Gass's model of SLA*), and interactionism (e.g. *Long's Interaction Theory*);
- to introduce the concept of **nature and nurture** in LA;
- to compare **L1A and SLA**;
- to show the implications of **SLA theories** on **language teaching**.

Objectives:

The students develop an understanding of how theories of learning influence the formation of SLA theories. They gain an insight into the relevance of SLA research to language teaching.

There are three major scientific traditions which had a decisive influence on the formation of theories of SLA: behaviourist, cognitive, and dialogical.

Behaviourist theories are the product of behaviourist psychology, which concentrates on the observable and hence external. The key stimulus for SLA is the environment, whilst learning is no more than a process of habit formation following a simple paradigm of stimulus and response. Whatever goes on inside the mind is not denied, but as it cannot be observed no attempts are made to analyse it.

Cognitive theories take into account the processes that may or may not happen within the mind. Deeply rooted in Cartesian philosophy and its faith in the superiority of the mind over the body, mental processes are at the core of everything and of all the theories, whether it is Chomsky's Universal Grammar or Long's Conversational Adjustment Hypothesis. They take into account the various ways of processing information and knowledge, the role of the different types of memory, and of input and output. Mental processes are governed by rules which operate within the "machine" of the brain. And as

cognitive psychology developed very much in the wake of the developments in the fields of mathematics and computing, the brain is often seen as a computer and the mind as the software operating within its framework. Human beings are believed to possess an innate capacity to acquire language, the effect of the environment is thus seen as negligible.

Finally, dialogical theories attempt to take into account the role of the environment, especially where communication and social interaction are concerned. They stem from Vygotsky's theory of the social origin of the mind.

4.1. Behaviourist theories of SLA

Behaviourists believed that language learning does not significantly differ from any other type of learning. First language acquisition is seen as a process of imitation and habit formation, and of putting smaller structures as the building blocks of a pyramid – phonetic features constitute phonological features, which in turn make up morphological structures that finally combine into syntax. (This paradigm forms the basis of structural linguistics.) Consequently, the teaching of foreign languages was to start with the teaching of pronunciation, each level of the pyramid was to be completed before the construction of the pyramid could continue. The smooth path of the habit formation leading towards second-language mastery was made difficult by the effects of first language interference.

One of the key theories was the **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis** (CAH). It arose out of the need to provide practical help for teachers of foreign languages. It is called contrastive as its main method was the comparing of the mother tongue with the foreign language, and realizing the areas of negative interference (the harmful effect of the L1 in the areas where it is dissimilar to L2) and positive interference (where the similarities between L1 and L2 can be exploited). The behaviourist stimulus-response is translated into the process of stimulus-response-reinforcement where reinforcement strengthens the response. Imitation and repetition are the key techniques, and "practice makes perfect" the key motto. As the founder of the approach, Robert Lado, pointed out in the introduction of the seminal treatise of the topic *Linguistics Across Cultures* "We can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. In our view, the preparation of up-to-date pedagogical and experimental materials must be based on this kind of comparison" (Lado 1957:vii). The classroom reality turned out to be somewhat more complex. Learners are found making unpredictable mistakes and not necessarily making the predictable ones. What also proved to be far more complex was the objective comparison of different languages. Following the lack of success in predicting problem areas, the "weaker" version of CAH concentrated on describing learner language in an attempt to pin down the reasons why problems occur, by analysing the so-called "observed difficulties". Both strong and weak CAH saw errors as sins which must be avoided and rooted out at all cost.

4.2. Towards cognitive theories

The preoccupation with errors led to the development of another behaviourist theory – Error Analysis (EA). Unlike CAH, EA does not try to explain learner errors by negative interference but simply by analysing the target language. Errors are not seen as sins but as

necessary steps towards mastery of the target language. Corder believes that learner errors are akin to the errors made by a child in the process of L1A. He sees them as attempts and hypotheses which the learner must experiment with and test to see whether he has made the right assumptions or not. The comparison with L1A gradually led to the development of **Morpheme Order Studies** (studying the logical order of acquisition) and the **L1=L2 Hypothesis** (also known as **Identity Hypothesis**). It claims that L1A and L2A are governed by essentially the same principles springing from an identical innate mechanism. SLA is no longer seen as merely a habit-formation exercise, but as a mental process. Behaviourism has given way to mentalism.

4.3. Cognitive theories of SLA

It was Chomsky's criticism of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* and his introduction of transformational grammar that started the cognitive revolution within the field of SLA theories. Chomsky argued that all human beings are born with a system of innate grammar which allows children to form sentences which have not been uttered before. Humans, and especially children, are thought to be in possession of a **language acquisition device**. Chomsky's theory of LA deals primarily with L1A, but the idea of Universal Grammar as a set of abstract principles applicable to all languages stretches the theory to the realm of SLA as well. Chomsky sees the mind with its predisposition for language acquisition and the environment which acts as a trigger mechanism that sets the switches of Universal Grammar to the parameters of a given language.

4.3.1. Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen's innatist **Input Hypothesis** is based on five main points:

1. **Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis** (internalization of language happens thanks to subconscious acquisition and conscious learning, but acquisition plays a far greater role in attaining fluency than learning);
2. **Monitor Hypothesis** (the body of language that the learner has learned acts as a "monitor" of the active production of language, the learner employs the monitor to perform self-monitoring and self-correction which is both good and bad as on the one hand it guarantees a higher degree of accuracy, but on the other hand it makes the learner pay more attention to form rather than meaning);
3. **Natural Order Hypothesis** (language is acquired in a natural, predictable order, but this order is not necessarily based on any features of complexity or simplicity, the natural order cannot be changed and is immune to deliberate teaching);
4. **Input Hypothesis** (learners should be exposed to language which is only a fraction more advanced than their own level, as this means they understand most of the input whilst being moderately challenged);
5. **Affective Filter Hypothesis** (the affective filter is a label for negative feelings such as anxiety, fear, self-doubt, boredom which impede acquisition; acquisition does not happen well in environments where the affective filter is high).

4.3.2. Attention-processing model

Attention-processing model (McLaughlin et al) apposes two procedures of information processing (controlled and automatic) and two categories of attention to formal properties

of language (focal and peripheral). Controlled processes are involved in learning and the early stages of practice, automatic processes manifest themselves in fluency and as such are the result of learning and automatization. This happens thanks to a process called restructuring in which older components are replaced by more efficient procedures (McLaughlin 1990).

4.3.3. Explicit and implicit learning

Other SLA models are based on the comparison of **explicit** and **implicit linguistic knowledge**. Implicit knowledge is spontaneous and automatic, explicit knowledge is the learner's concrete knowledge of information on the target language. It is the processing of implicit and explicit knowledge that constitutes the act of learning a foreign language. The model (developed by Bialystok) subsumes McLaughlin's concept of automaticity based on the learner's ease of access to knowledge. Automatic knowledge is easily accessible, non-automatic is accessed with difficulty. The model introduces the dimension of time by relating the complexity of a given linguistic aspect to the length of time the learner needs before he can employ the aspect in oral production. Adult learning happens as a result of combining both implicit and explicit processes with one proviso – implicit processes should outweigh the explicit ones. If we think about these two cognitive models in the light of their application to teaching we can formulate two basic principles:

- learning, teaching and practice should lead to the automatization of linguistic processes;
- learners should develop a degree of awareness and understanding of how concrete rules affect the use of the target language.

4.3.4. Interaction Theory

One of the more recent trends in the search for a SLA theory, Long's **Interaction Theory**, stems from social constructivism. It criticizes innatist and cognitivist models of SLA for being too learner-centred and for ignoring the effect of the social surroundings in which acquisition happens. It claims that as learners learn through interaction and input linguists should focus on the study of how communicative strategies (such as simplifying speech for the benefit of the learner, checking the learner's comprehension etc) which are at play in the social environment contribute to learning. Whilst this theory has many practical implications for teaching (designing contexts for interaction in the classroom, task-based teaching) it does not yet offer any practical models to show how language is acquired (internal processes) and it lacks empirical data on which its findings can be verified.

4.4. Attempts at defining dialogical theories

Dialogical theories owe its existence to the principles postulated by Lev Vygotsky, and especially to the ideas of learning being socially constructed, and that of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The other factor of key importance is Bakhtin's dialogized heteroglossia, a theory of knowledge which tries to explain human behaviour by means of the dialogic concept of language, a belief that higher mental functioning takes form of an inner dialogue with oneself and, simultaneously, internal dialogues with others. Drawing on both Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Johnson (2004:179) formulates principles for the construction of a new model of SLA and their implication for classroom teaching. She sees

the classroom as “a sociocultural setting where an active participation in the target language culture is taught, promoted, and cultivated” and also as a place where individual ZPD is created for each student (ibid.:180). Teaching should help “expose L2 learners to different interpretations of the same reality, to create an awareness of the existence of a multitude of shared realities, or to help L2 learners develop different levels of intersubjectivity. Also, the knowledge and skills acquired in interactive classroom activities within individualized ZPDs should be relevant to the L2 learner’s particular needs and goals outside the classroom.” (ibid.) Last but not least, she sees SLA as “the process of becoming an active participant in the target language culture.” In this way, the dialogically based approaches to SLA combine cognitive and social traditions.

4.5. Comparing L1A and L2A

L1 and L2 acquisition are full of differences and similarities. Let us compare the starting point of a baby acquiring its mother tongue with a SL learner. According to most theories, they probably both have an innate capacity for language, or – in the words of Steven Pinker – a language instinct. The SL learner also has the knowledge of his L1 and possibly of other languages which can, on the one hand cause negative interference, on the other they can provide help in understanding the abstract structures of the language studied. The SL learner is older, and is likely to have more experience in learning and social interaction. He has also developed a control of his speech organs, which is something the child has yet to handle. The L2 learner is, on the other hand, likely to be affected by many learner variables which might have an adverse effect (previous learning experience, bad habits, anxiety, stress etc.). As far as we can judge, the learner possesses much more to start off with than the baby, even though many researchers believe that the innate capacity for acquiring L1 does not stretch to L2.

During the learning process, the learner develops a language called interlanguage (IL) (see Chapter 9) and the baby “works on” its baby talk. Both are systematic, and both are spontaneous. IL is to some extent influenced by language transfer. The language of the child develops along with the child’s personality, which is a factor that does not play much role in SLA. On the other hand, what the learner knows about the world and languages plays a role in the formation of the IL. The child is likely to have much more exposure to the acquired language, and it also has significantly more time to achieve its goal. However, it goes about largely uninstructed, intuitively gleaning correct structures from non-standard ones. Again, the situation of the learner seems more auspicious, he seems to have more at hand. The one area in which he seriously lacks is the amount of exposure, and the amount of time he has for completing the learning process.

The baby grows into an adult with a native linguistic competence and what we might call a feel for his mother tongue. The learner reaches a plateau which he will forever be slipping from unless he uses the L2 on a regular basis and carries on learning. In most cases, the state of the art that he has achieved is often fraught with inadequacies of various types, which are in the best cases cleverly masked by the judicious use of communication strategies (see Chapter 11). He has, however, added another linguistic dimension to his make up – the ability to communicate in another language. Both learners can make progress, even a competent adult can almost endlessly improve his mother-tongue

competence. The learner's progress needn't stop either but most learners feel it takes much more effort. But very few learners will ever reach native-like competence.

4.6. Language acquisition theories and language teaching

There are many theories of L1 and L2 acquisition, some more popular or likely than others, but most of them built on unstable foundations of our more or less scientific attempts at surmising how the brain works, and how precisely it affects language acquisition. Some of these theories and beliefs have had an effect on language teaching methods, but mostly, the domains of language teaching and language acquisition research have different goals and focus. A basic overview of L1 and L2 acquisition theories leads to a greater teacher awareness (see Chapter 13), it can also provide answers to the many questions which are raised in the teachers' own teaching experience. As such it is worth presenting to teacher trainees. But the current state of knowledge does not – and possibly cannot – offer global solutions to regular teaching situations. As William James, one of the founders of educational psychology, observed in 1899 “psychology is a science while teaching is an art”. Rephrased by Mitchell and Myles (1998:261), “teaching is an art as well as a science”.

Seminar 4 – student interaction

1. What are the possible manifestations of the innate capacity to learn a language?
2. Why do some linguists believe that the innate capacity to learn a language affects only first language acquisition?
3. Which of the differences and similarities between first and second language acquisition do you consider most important?
4. When does language development stop? Can it regress? Is it the same for L1 and L2?
5. How can these findings affect practical, classroom teaching?

Seminar 4 – student presentations

Animals and language (attempts at teaching animals to use language etc.)

recommended sources for presentation:

Akmajian, A. (1995) *Linguistics : An Introduction to Language and Communication*, MIT Press
 Yule, G. (2010) *The Study of Language*, Cambridge University Press

Seminar 4 – Literature:

Bialystok, E. and K. Hakuta (1994) *In Other Words, The Science and Psychology of Second Language Acquisition*, Harper Collins
 Brown, H. D. (2007) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
 Ellis, R. (1985), *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford University Press
 Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker (2008) *Second Language Acquisition*, Routledge
 Hoff, E. (2009) 'First Language Acquisition', in E. Anderman et al., *Psychology of classroom learning*, pp. 409–413, Macmillan
 Ingram, D. (1989) *First Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press
 Johnson, M. (2004) *A Philosophy of Second Language Acquisition*, Yale University Press
 Jordan, G. (2004) *Theory Construction in Second Language Acquisition*, John Benjamin Publishing Company
 Krashen, S. (1976) 'Formal and informal linguistic environments in language acquisition and language learning'. *TESOL Quarterly* 10, 157–168
 Krashen, S. (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Pergamon Press
 Lightbown, P. M. and N. Spada (2006) *How Languages are Learned (Third Edition)*, Oxford University Press
 Mitchell, R. and F. Myles (1998) *Second Language Learning Theories*, Hodder Arnold
 Saville-Troike, M. (2006) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press

Chapter 5

Seminar 5 – Learner variables I

Aims:

- to provide an introduction to the concept of **learner variables**;
- to discuss **critical period hypothesis**, and the characteristics of the three **age** groups: young children, adolescents and adult learners;
- to discuss the effect of **gender** on learning and language learning;
- to analyse the role of **motivation** in language learning.

Objectives:

The students learn to understand how learner factors affect language learning, what roles in FLL are played by age, gender and motivation, and how teachers can take these factors into account in the instruction process.

That learners are different is a simple fact with far reaching implications. Some of them, such as age and gender, aptitude and intelligence, are of course constants, which the teacher cannot affect. Others, such as motivation, attitude or anxiety can be modified by the teacher's work. Both types of variables, however, must be deeply understood by the teacher so that he can take them into account in addressing the needs of his students, their individual requirements and the various constraints on the learning process.

5.1. Age

It is commonly believed that the ability of children to learn a foreign language far exceeds that of adults. However, this is a rather simplistic view. Whilst children are not easily impeded by mistakes, and are thus quick to apply what little they may have learnt, adults benefit from their more developed intellect and understanding of their own learning style. They are often better at memorizing, grasping abstract concepts and they usually learn more effectively. However, establishing general rules is problematic – as Lightbown and Spada (1998:42) point out, different age groups have different conditions for learning and it is difficult to make comparisons. There are so many other important factors at play besides age.

One of the key concepts in LA is the **critical period hypothesis** (CPH) which claims that in human life there is an ideal period of time in which languages can be learnt. The theory was

established by Wilder Penfield and Lamar Roberts in the late 1950s¹ and developed a decade later by Eric Lenneberg². Whilst it originally dealt with L1A, it was later extended to L2A as well. The last two decades have seen a number of studies which pose serious challenges to CPH – it seems that older learners move faster than children in the initial stages, but they do not achieve as high a degree of proficiency as learners who start at an earlier age. Lightbown and Spada (1998:41–50) present a review of several studies and make several important conclusions:

- older children and adolescents, on the whole, are most efficient learners;
- younger children are most likely to adopt native-like pronunciation;
- there does not seem to be as much advantage at starting to learn a second language early as is often claimed, unless a high level of regular exposure can be guaranteed;
- adult learners can reach a very high level of proficiency whilst they often (but not always) retain a strong foreign accent.

What is of paramount importance is the degree of significant exposure to the language. And it is often in this area that younger learners are at an advantage as they generally come into contact with the TL more often (e.g. through regular lessons at school) and for longer periods of time.

Whilst the current state of research does not allow us to know precisely how age affects our ability to learn a language, it is beyond doubt that learner's age has general implications for the style of learning and teaching, as different age groups have different cognitive skills and learn differently. It is therefore vital that teachers on all levels have adequate training in developmental psychology, and that they strive to understand how their students process and retain information.

5.1.1. Characteristics of different age groups: young children

The young learner in the SLA environment (typically immigrants) fares much better than his parents. Initially, the parents will make more progress but within a relatively short period of time the child will start catching up and his chances of acquiring a native like proficiency and accent in the long run are incomparable with those of his parents.

At school, in the FLL environment, the young child is a fairly slow learner. Thornbury (2006:10) points out that despite the trends throughout Europe to introduce language learning at schools at as early an age as possible, “the results and benefits of this policy are still inconclusive”. He argues that unless there is regular exposure, by which he means that one or two hours a week is not sufficient, no harm will be done but the learners will not make a significant progress and the time spent on language lessons could better be spent on other subjects.

¹Penfield, W. and L. Roberts (1959) *Speech and Brain Mechanisms*, Princeton University Press

²Lenneberg, E. H. (1967) *Biological Foundations of Language*, Wiley & Sons

In her review of research concentrating on the comparison of instructed and naturalistic L2 learning Munoz (2008) warns against such generalizations as “the younger the better” by observing that “An inferential leap has been made in the assumption that learning age will have the same effect on learners in an immersion setting as on students of a foreign language, when the latter are exposed to only one speaker of that language (the teacher) in only one setting (the classroom) and for only limited amounts of time (Muñoz 2006b). However, recent studies conducted in foreign language settings have clearly illustrated the role of input and exposure in the equation: an early start leads to success *but only provided that it is associated with enough significant exposure.*” (italics are original author’s own)

It appears clear that children can acquire a new language with ease if they are in the right conditions, having regular significant exposure and qualified teachers with special training for teaching this young age group. This can make up for their otherwise slower general cognitive skills. If these conditions are not fulfilled, progress will be very slow and insignificant.

Teachers of young children need to be aware especially of the following facts:

- young children do not understand the adult concept of linguistic correctness;
- they do not easily grasp abstract concepts (this impedes the conceptualization of rules);
- they have a low attention span and consequently need a lot of variety and a frequent change of activities;
- they need a lot of patience and emotional support from the teacher;
- they learn best indirectly rather than directly;
- they need to engage all of the senses;
- they respond well to non-verbal language and experiential learning;
- they are very curious and do extremely well with an enthusiastic teacher who can feed their interest;
- they respond well to physical activities, music, songs, chants, hands-on activities, games, humour, pictures, stories, roleplays and projects;
- they do well in bright, colourful classrooms with a lot of pictures and friendly, non-aggressive visual decorations.

5.1.2. Characteristics of different age groups: adolescents

Adolescents are generally considered the hardest age group to teach, yet for those teachers who have learnt the intricacies of communication with teenagers, this frequently is one of the most rewarding age groups to teach. This is especially because they can make very fast progress. By this age, they are likely to have developed their cognitive and metacognitive skills, they can become very passionate about learning if they are provided the right type of input. It requires a fairly experienced teacher who understands that adolescence is a quest for one’s own identity and that this is perhaps the most emotionally challenging periods of one’s life. Consequently, the good teacher of adolescents must be extremely empathetic. He may never patronize and embarrass the students.

Teachers of adolescents need to be aware especially of the following facts:

- peer pressure is an extremely important factor;
- attention is likely to be a problem and hence adolescents need to be provided with

- engaging activities;
- they need to be motivated and inspired by the teacher's example;
- they need to be praised and appreciated;
- the teacher needs to recognize their strengths and talents and make them part of the learning process;
- they are likely to challenge the teacher, who needs to have a clear strategy for dealing with discipline problems;
- they are likely to be judgmental and hence it is recommended that the teacher negotiates the style of teaching and the choice of topics with the students;
- they are fairly independent learners but they still need a lot of experienced guidance from the teacher.

5.1.3. Characteristics of different age groups: adults

Adult learners need to have their needs assessed and addressed very accurately. They can make outstanding learners as their motivation is often fairly high. At the same time, they can be impeded in their own learning by many external factors and pressures that the younger learners do not face, especially distinct lack of time and general stress. It is vital that classroom time is used as effectively as possible as many adult learners may find very little time outside the classroom for undisturbed, effective learning and practice.

Teachers of adolescents need to be aware especially of the following facts:

- they can deal with a fairly high level of abstraction but this cannot always be taken for granted;
- they have a longer attention span;
- they do not need to have all their senses engaged and, in fact, often feel embarrassed if they are made to participate in physical activities in the classroom;
- they respond well to advice on the selection of learning strategies;
- they can have high expectations from the course and can be quite critical of the teacher, especially as many of them have very firm learner beliefs;
- they are often highly motivated but the teacher should still work on their motivation to keep the students focussed;
- they may be anxious in the classroom environment;
- they bring into the classroom a whole world of life experience but also, very often, of personal problems. Some learners enjoy sharing their problems with the teacher, others can closely guard their privacy and respond adversely to any questions which might reveal unpleasant, intimate or private facts about their lives. It is therefore essential that the teacher sensitively assesses the situation and builds up a relationship based on confidence, tact and mutual respect.

5.2. Gender

The relationship between gender and language excites considerable academic interest. Studies show that men and women use language differently, and they also seem to have a different verbal ability. It has also been shown that men and women learn differently, and that women employ a significantly larger range of learning strategies. There is evidence from psychological studies that girls mature faster than boys. Whilst these are significant claims and findings, there has not been much significant effort to approach the topic of

language learning and teaching from the perspective of gender.³ Different approach to teaching boys and girls is hard to implement in mixed classes, but it seems clear that it might have a positive effect on the learners' motivation and the development of appropriate learning strategies. Here teachers who understand differences between boys' and girls' psychology can help guide their students in the right direction towards adopting the most appropriate study techniques. They can also consider choosing different types of materials for both genders, and they can organize activities and group work with all of the girl-boy issues in mind (e.g. mixed groups).

5.3. Motivation

Motivation is a key factor which plays a major role in the success of learning. In its broadest sense, motivation is the drive which leads the individual towards the realization of a goal. It provides the initial impetus to start learning, and then it helps the learner carry on with the process despite possible problems encountered on the way. It also determines the degree to which the learner devotes himself to his goal. Gardner (1985:6) notes that as the various components of a language present to the learner a different culture "students' attitudes toward the specific language group are bound to influence how successful they will be in incorporating aspects of that language." Conversely, a lack of motivation can result in a complete or partial failure despite the fact that all other learning conditions and factors are satisfied.

There is a multitude of theories of motivation, which highlights the fact that the concept of motivation is rather an elusive one. Motivational theories recognize different types of motivation. Of those relative to language learning, mention must be made of **integrative motivation** (a desire to learn L2 in order to integrate in the community that uses the language, or simply associate with another speaker of the language), and **instrumental motivation** (recognizing practical value of learning L2, e.g. for professional purposes, passing a test at school, travelling etc.). Other possible distinction could be made between **intrinsic motivation** (e.g. love for languages) and **extrinsic motivation** (e.g. professional requirements).

As motivation greatly aids success, it has become a primary concern of teachers and textbook writers. Teachers should be aware that there are many internal and external factors which affect motivation, and that they can directly influence many of these factors and to generate and maintain high motivation levels of their students. The current wealth of materials, methods and techniques should make that job fairly manageable. Besides this work, teachers can also strive to increase the students' self-motivation. Possible strategies for this task have been suggested especially by Dörnyei (2005), who describes "1. commitment control strategies for helping to preserve or increase the learners' original goal

³A notable exception is Carr and Pauwels (2006) who, despite establishing that girls are on the whole better equipped for language-learning, do not actually advocate any special, boy-friendly or girl-friendly approaches. Instead, they make an obvious call for "all-purpose effective practice" (p. 205) that is inherently interesting, challenging, relevant and productive, which will engage boys, but also value-add for girls, providing them with more productive learning experiences. " (ibid.)

commitment; 2. metacognitive control strategies for monitoring and controlling concentration, and for curtailing unnecessary procrastination; 3. satiation control strategies for eliminating boredom and adding extra attraction or interest to the task; 4. emotion control strategies for managing disruptive emotional states or moods, and for generating emotions that are conducive to implementing one's intentions; 5. environmental control strategies for eliminating negative environmental influences and exploiting positive environmental influences by making the environment an ally in the pursuit of a difficult goal."

The ability to identify what motivates individual learners (who might not themselves be always aware of their own motivators) should be one of the primary skills of every teacher. Some key approaches in motivating students include appropriateness of expectations, encouraging learner self-belief, encouraging diversity and creativity, providing feedback, minimising pressure, selecting materials and tasks appropriate to the age and level of the students, catering for different learning styles, ensuring that teaching is meaningful, encouraging student responsibility for their own learning, appraising and rewarding student progress, setting realistic goals, connecting materials to students' interests, preparing authentic tasks, showing passion and enthusiasm for the subject, providing early success opportunities, being clear about expectations, being fair, describing effective strategies.

Seminar 5 – student interaction:

1. Describe the areas in which older learners of L2 are at an advantage over children. What, on the contrary, is easier for younger learners? How would you, as a teacher of English benefit from this knowledge?
2. Why do some theories speak of critical period for LA and some prefer to use the label *sensitive period*?
3. What can motivate EFL students? Discuss the following situations. Is the motivation in the respective cases extrinsic or intrinsic?
desire to live in an English-speaking country – ability to read literature in English – necessity to read professional literature in one's field of work or study – getting good grades at school – raising one's self esteem – socializing with expats – finding a foreign partner – love for languages – interest in the culture of English-speaking countries – chances to get a better job – wanting to please one's parents
4. How can teachers increase the motivation of their students? What can reduce students' motivation?
5. What is your main motivation in life? Why? How does it manifest itself in your behaviour?

Seminar 5 – student presentations:

1. Intelligence – definitions, history of testing, problems etc.
recommended sources for presentation: Strickland, B. (ed.) (2001) *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Gale Group, pp. 333-337
Andermann, E. & L. Andermann (2009) *Psychology of classroom learning*, Macmillan, pp. 497-503

2. Bilingualism and intelligence

recommended sources for presentation: Romaine, S. (2001) *Bilingualism*, Blackwell Publisher Ltd., pp. 107-118

Seminar 5 – literature:

- Brophy, J.** (2004) *Motivating Students to Learn*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Brown, H. D.** (2007) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Brown, H. D.** (2007) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Carroll, J. B.** (1965) *The prediction of success in intensive foreign language training*. In R. Glaser (ed.), *Training, Research and Education* (pp. 87–136). New York: Wiley
- Chambers, G. N.** (1999) *Motivating Language Learners*, Multilingual Matters Ltd
- Dörnyei, Z.** (2001) *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press
- Dörnyei, Z.** (2005) *The Psychology of the Language Learner*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Dörnyei, Z.** (2009) *The Psychology of Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford University Press
- Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker** (2008) *Second Language Acquisition*, Routledge
- Gardner, R.** (1985) *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*, Arnold.
- Jordan, A., O. Carlile and A. Stack** (2008) *Approaches to Learning*, Open University Press
- Krashen, S.** (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Pergamon Press
- Lightbown, P. M. and N. Spada** (2006) *How Languages are Learned (Third Edition)*, Oxford University Press
- Mayo, M. and M. Lecumberri** (2003) *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*, Multilingual Matters Ltd
- Munoz, C.** (2006) *Age And the Rate of Foreign Language Learning*, Multilingual Matters Ltd
- Munoz, C.** (2008) 'Symmetries and asymmetries of age effects in naturalistic and instructed L2 learning.' *Applied Linguistics* 2008, 29: 578-96
- Naiman, N. et al.** (1996) *The Good Language Learner*, Multilingual Matters
- Oxford, L.R.** (1999) *Second Language Learning: Individual Differences*. In Spolsky, B. (ed.) (1999) *Concise Encyclopedia of Educational Linguistics*, Elsevier
- Ross, B. H.** (2003) *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, Elsevier

Chapter 6

Seminar 6 – Learner variables II

Aims:

- to introduce the concept of **linguistic aptitude** and the ways of measuring it;
- to discuss how **intelligence** affects language learning (LL);
- to introduce a theory of **multiple intelligences** and its application to LL;
- to present the concept of **learner beliefs**;
- to explain the theory of **learning styles**;
- to introduce the concept of the **affective filter**.

Objectives:

The students should learn to appreciate which other individual features (other than those mentioned in the previous seminar) affect the language-learning process with a view to developing appropriate teaching strategies.

6.1. Aptitude

Linguistic aptitude is what people commonly call talent for languages. It is generally recognized that some people can acquire a FL with a greater ease than others. Various tests (mainly the *Modern Language Aptitude Test* and the *Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery*) have been designed with a view to predicting a student's likelihood of success and ease in FLA. These are based on four principles defined by J. Carroll (1965):

- *phonemic coding ability* – the ability to separate the stream of speech into phonemes to allow the recognition of morphemes;
- *inductive language learning ability* – the ability to induce rules and notice patterns in a language;
- *grammatical sensitivity* – the ability to identify grammatical functions of individual words in a sentence;
- *associative memory capacity* – the ability to store and recall linguistic items.

The test, however, ignores other important factors such as motivation, personality and exposure to name just a few. It does not fully address the various possibilities where different learners may possess a different degree of various abilities (e.g. a learner with a high phonemic coding ability may not necessarily be endowed with a very good memory).

There may also be a considerable overlap between language aptitude and intelligence. It is also rather debatable whether there is such a thing as language aptitude as it is hard to distinguish it from other intellectual abilities.

One of the most recent language aptitude tests is called the *Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language as Applied to Foreign Language Test* (CANAL-FT). During the test, participants work with an artificial language and through various tasks their ability to store, recall, analyse and comprehend linguistic information is measured (Grigorenko et al., 2000).

6.2. Intelligence

Another way of trying to predict a learner's success in SLA is taking into account his intelligence. Lightbown and Spada (1998:37) suggest that "intelligence is more related to those second-language skills which are used in the formal study of a language (i.e. reading, language analysis, writing and vocabulary study), but that intelligence is much less likely to influence the way in which oral communication skills are developed." They also point out that intelligence is "strongly related to metalinguistic knowledge". This interpretation, however, very much hinges on how we define intelligence. Many theoretical works use the labels intelligence and aptitude interchangeably. The traditional concept of IQ (calculated by means of logical, mathematical and linguistic tests) has been challenged by other theories, such as Gardner's **multiple intelligences** (which will be discussed in Chapter 6), Sternberg's **Triarchic Theory of Intelligence** (1985) or Goleman's **emotional intelligence**. These theories point out, above all, to the fact that intelligence is a set of several constituent abilities. Analysing what they are and what role they play in language learning sheds more light on what constitutes a talent for languages and, by extension, how this knowledge can be utilized in teaching.

6.3. Multiple intelligences theory

Modern psychology recognizes different types of intelligence. One of the most frequently cited models is that of Howard Gardner, who identifies three essential components of intelligence:

- the capacity for solving problems in life;
- the capacity for creating new problems which need to be solved;
- the capacity for making contributions to the benefit of one's culture.

He then posits that every person possesses several different types of intelligences. His findings are perhaps best summarized in a table:

Intelligence	Preferred activity	Strengths	Preferred methods
Verbal/ Linguistic	reading, writing, telling stories	memorizing	working with words

Visual/ Spatial	drawing, pictures, movies	imagination, understanding charts	visualising, working with pictures
Logical/ Mathematical	working things out, experiments, analysing patterns	problem solving, maths, logic, reasoning	classifying, working with patterns, categorising
Bodily kinaesthetic	moving, touching, using body language	acting, physical activities and sport	using bodily sensations, touching, manipulating objects
Musical/ Rhythmic	listening to and performing music, singing	picking up sounds, remembering melodies,	songs, music, rhythm, pronunciation
Intrapersonal	learning alone	understanding their own needs and goals	individualised instruction, self- study
Interpersonal	socialising, interacting with others	communicating, organising	sharing, cooperating, communicating

Whilst one can see at a glance the limitations of such a simplified model, it once again brings to the forefront the fact that language learners have a multitude of different characteristics, and when they all meet in a classroom, the teacher should present a wide variety of activities that will challenge all types of learners, learning and cognitive styles, and personalities, as not all activities and tasks are appropriate for all learners. The current book market offers a vast choice of resource books for teachers many of which specialize in the areas described by the multiple intelligences theory (e.g. the series Oxford Resource Books for Teachers, or Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers).

6.4. Learner beliefs

When, in 1988, Horwitz developed a questionnaire for the evaluation of learner beliefs, she wanted to provide examples of learner beliefs teachers might encounter in language classrooms. She developed a taxonomy consisting of five domains:

- beliefs regarding perceived L2 difficulty;
- beliefs regarding FL aptitude;
- beliefs regarding the nature of language learning;
- beliefs regarding strategies for learning and communication;
- beliefs regarding motivation and expectations.

Whilst we could argue that her questionnaire was largely based on the assumptions of teachers as to what their students believe, rather than on real learner beliefs collected from students, Horwitz's work gave rise to more research and a realization that learner beliefs are probably most closely connected to metacognition (see Chapter 11), and that they have a definite effect on the process of L2A. In conclusion to his review of research in the field Dörnyei (2005:217) observes that whilst the current state of knowledge is riddled with ambiguities, there is a significant potential for practical purposes, as "creating realistic learner beliefs is an important motivational strategy, and periodically administering the BALLI, or a similar instrument, to groups of learners is a valuable means of raising their awareness of the nature of language learning." Once again, we are met with the concept of **awareness**, which is coming to be generally recognized as one of the key aspects contributing to L2 mastery.

6.5. Learning styles

The theory of learning styles consists in a belief that different learners have different learning requirements depending on how they process (i.e. obtain, digest, and retain) information – some learn best deductively, others inductively, some tend to prefer visual presentations, others auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile. Every learner is supposed to fall into a certain group of shared characteristics which remain constant throughout the individual's life. Greater success in learning is supposed to be guaranteed if learning preferences of the individual are met.

The concept of learning styles has attracted much attention, but it is also a highly controversial one. As yet, no research has managed to provide concrete data which would prove that matching learners with a specific type of instruction is directly linked to academic success. Research has also failed to provide a basic definition on which further research could be based. This is not helped by the fact that there are too many (seventy-one according to one study) models of learning styles, employing numerous labels and failing to distinguish properly between styles, personality and intellect. Rather than prove the benefits of employing learner-style informed instruction, studies show that learner styles change along with the change's in the learners' needs and proficiency. As Kuhn (in Anderman 2009:577) points out "it is likely that students learn best not as the result of a dominant processing preference being matched to its corresponding instructional approach, but as a result of educators' designing instructional approaches that are appropriate for the learning requirements of a particular situation. So that even auditory learners will develop a deeper understanding of, say, certain scientific concepts when given the opportunity to see a demonstration of that concept, than when they simply hear about that concept through a lecture." In trying to find alternatives to learning styles Kuhn (ibid) recommends the common-sense principle of basing instruction on multiple modalities, incorporating "visual, auditory, and tactile processing rather than just relying on one of these elements", and she advises teachers to search alternative ways of presenting information so that breakdowns in learning can be avoided. This approach is especially suited to classroom teaching, where, by the very nature of things, there is a variety of personalities and learning styles at play. Moreover, it has been shown that different styles do not exclude each other, and the most successful learners are to be found amongst those who combine different styles.

Trying to answer why talk about learning styles and why they have attracted so much attention, Dörnyei (2005) suggests that there is “something genuinely appealing” about them, especially as they do not make the usual distinction between the gifted and the untalented, but rather take into account personal differences. Even top researchers in the field agree that we should give the concept the benefit of the doubt even though we are not absolutely sure whether learning styles really exist (Dörnyei, 2005:124).¹

The label *learning styles* is sometimes used interchangeably with *cognitive styles*. Other researchers (e.g. Dörnyei), however, differentiate between them, claiming that **cognitive styles** denote a biologically predetermined preferred way of responding to information, whilst learning styles are the application of cognitive styles within an educational context.

6.5.1. Kolb’s model of learning styles

Kolb’s model presents the most commonly accepted model of learning styles. By combining two dimensions, abstract vs. concrete thinking and active vs. reflective information processing he identifies four types of learners: accommodators (they enjoy flexibility, risk-takers), assimilators (keen on problem-solving), convergers (prefer detailed steps in learning), divergers (need personal involvement in tasks). Reading their detailed individual characteristics, however, reminds one of the style of horoscopes – so much of it seems to fit so many people. Yet again, however, it points to the fact that classrooms are full of very different people, and for the teacher to be effective in his struggle he has to involve them all by being creative in his choice of different techniques.

Many more models of learning styles could have been introduced here but they would all suffer from the same limitations as those highlighted above. Moreover, the theory of learning styles puts the teacher in an unfortunate situation where he is expected to assess the learning styles of his students. And this is not an easy matter as no reliable methodology has been invented. The discussion of learning styles, however, is not a meaningless one on any account. It bears testimony to the fact that there is a multitude of highly individual factors which play role in the learning process. Through learning about them, teachers will realize that with so many different learners in their classrooms they have to use methods, techniques, materials and tasks which are as varied as possible so that they can cater for as many different styles as possible. They should not, as is too often the case, simply impose their own preferred way of learning, but realize that what is good for some might not be appropriate for others. They should, in short, develop a highly flexible teaching style. And they should assist their students in discovering their own learning styles and their practical implications, discuss their students’ language beliefs and attempt to instil such beliefs that raise both motivation and language awareness.

¹Here we shouldn’t confuse the traditional concept of learning styles with learning strategies. These will be discussed in Chapter 11.

6.6. Affective filter

In his *Monitor Theory* Krashen observes that there are several emotional or affective factors which impede SLA. These are, for example, anxiety, low self-confidence or self-esteem, but also boredom, which can act as a filter between the learner and his partner in communication or the learning process. As some of these concepts are difficult to measure and assess, I shall concentrate only on two of the most researched ones – anxiety, and willingness to communicate.

6.6.1. Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety is the fear some learners experience when they have to perform in a foreign language. This performance can refer to a variety of tasks such as speaking, listening, being tested, or even the very process of learning itself (e.g. class anxiety). Anxiety usually has a negative effect on the speaker's ability to communicate in the foreign language, it may worsen his memory or induce untypical slips. Dörnyei (2005:198), however, distinguishes between “inhibitory/debilitating” anxiety, which has a negative effect on performance, and “beneficial/facilitating” anxiety, which may actually promote performance. This might depend on both the degree of anxiety, and the type of the speaker (e.g. introvert vs. extrovert). Dörnyei, however, points out that most researchers associate anxiety with negative effects, and thus strive to find methods of reducing anxiety. This is, for example, the basis of Desuggestopedia, but it should be a factor for consideration by most teachers, who should try to recognize which types of teaching variables induce anxiety, and which, on the contrary, reduce it. As a link is generally found between anxiety and self-confidence, teachers can try to alleviate anxiety by promoting self-confidence, for example by praising their students, by carefully selecting tasks which are not unmanageable, and by creating a generally relaxed, stress-free learning atmosphere in the classroom. They should also develop a high degree of sensitivity to the fact that some of their learners are much more prone to feel anxiety than others (they might, for instance, perform much better in pair-work than in front of the whole class). A question also rises, whether there is a relation between the degree of anxiety we occasionally feel when communicating in our mother tongue, and FL anxiety.

6.6.2. Willingness to communicate (WTC)

Some people are by nature more reticent than others. When this personality trait is combined with the issue of L2 proficiency, some L2 learners might display a very low degree of WTC, which can affect their performance both in the language classroom and in standard communicative situations. WTC has been in the limelight of research for the last two decades² and it has identified factors which contribute to WTC (e.g. language anxiety, perceived communication competence, personality, self-confidence, motivation, group climate, desire to communicate with a specific person). Baker and MacIntyre (2000, cited in Dörnyei 2005:208) observed that WTC constitutes one of the differences between FLA and SLA – FL learners show reduced WTC compared to immersion students in an SL environment.

²One of the leading researchers in the field is P. D. MacIntyre, who also writes profusely on the topic of language anxiety.

Seminar 6 – student interaction:

1. What are the problems of defining language aptitude?
2. How would you, as an English teacher implement Gardner's model?
3. How important is it for learners to understand themselves? How can the teacher help?
4. What are your learner beliefs? Have they developed along with your proficiency? Have any of them helped you or held you back?
5. Are you aware of your own learning style? Has it in any way affected the way you have been studying? Has anything worked against you in your attempts to learn foreign languages?

Seminar 6 – student presentations:

1. Multiple intelligences theory
recommended sources for presentation: Moseley, D. et al. (2005) *Frameworks for Thinking*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 206-213
2. Music aptitude and second language acquisition
recommended sources for presentation: Morgan, C. (2003) *Musical aptitude and second-language phonetics learning: implications for teaching methodology*, Simon Fraser University

Seminar 6 – literature:

- Anderman, E. et al. (2009) *Psychology of Classroom Learning*, Macmillan Reference USA
- Brown, H. D. (2007) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Brown, H. D. (2007) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
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- Dörnyei, Z. (2005) *The Psychology of the Language Learner*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
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- Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008) *Lessons from Good Language Learners*, Cambridge University Press
- Hewitt, D. (2008) *Understanding Effective Learning*, Open University Press
- Ireson, J. (2008) *Learners, Learning and Educational Activity*, Routledge
- Johnson, K. (ed.) (2005) *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Lamb, T. and H. Reinders (ed.) (2008) *Learner and Teacher Autonomy*, John Benjamins Publishing Company
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- Reid, G. (2007) *Motivating Learners in the Classroom: Ideas and Strategies*, Paul Chapman Publishing
- Sprenger, M. (2005) *How to Teach so Students Remember*, ASCD
- Tennant, M. (2003) *Psychology and Adult Learning*, Routledge

Chapter 7

Seminar 7 – Language, memory and the brain

Aims:

- to introduce basic facts about the processing of **language in the brain**;
- to discuss brain **lateralization**;
- to describe how **memory** works and how both teachers and students can apply this knowledge.

Objectives:

The students should learn to understand the basics of our knowledge about the workings of the brain in relation to language and memory. They should also learn to see how this knowledge can affect how we teach and learn.

In the material world, we can hardly imagine anything else more complex than the human brain. Perhaps the universe? And is the brain really just a part of the material world? Is it just this heap of brain cells with their mysterious connections, or is there more to it? Perhaps something strangely immaterial? What is so tantalizing about this is that at present we simply do not know. We have developed technology which enables us to look deep inside the brain, and yet there is so much that we do not know, and so much of what we do know we cannot interpret. One of the biggest mysteries hidden in the brain is language.

7.1. Brain

At present, our knowledge of the way the brain processes language is rather scanty. There is a dearth of tools, but a great promise that with the advance of technology we might soon be able to learn more. The first recorded discoveries in the field were made by Egyptian surgeons some 5,000 years ago. But it was not until the late 19th century that a French anatomist and anthropologist Paul Broca discovered an area of the brain which is associated with the production of language, and a German neuropathologist Carl Wernicke noticed that another area of the brain seems to be responsible for the comprehension of language. These areas of the brain are called *Broca's area*, and *Wernicke's area*. Other parts of the brain have since been found responsible for various language-related skills such as *Exner's centre* (writing), *Heschl's gyri* (auditory reception) and others. Early methods of studying the linguistic functions of the brain concentrated on observing how damage to the brain influences language. The 20th century saw the development of many new methods

such as the *electroencephalographs* (EEG), which records brain waves (electrical activity generated in the brain), *magnetic resonance imaging* (MRI), which displays a sliced-up image of the brain at various depths, *positron emission tomography* (PET), which studies the chemical activity of the brain, and *magnetoencephalography* (MEG), which measures the electromagnetic fields generated by the brain at work as it processes various tasks and verbal commands.

The extreme complexity of neuroscience presents a major obstacle for the understanding by non-specialists. And, perhaps somewhat sadly in this respect, neuroscientists do not study the brain with regard to education. Yet, I believe, there are important implications of brain-based research for effective teaching. Here are at least a few:

- brain-based research shows that at least some learning differences are biologically based and hence some learners will require different methods, and perhaps also more empathy;
- studies with rats have shown that they learn better when they interact with other rats. Likewise, humans are social beings and learning should be seen as a social process.;
- for the brain to develop, life must include challenges (again, studies of rats show they form more synapses in a challenging environment);
- play is an important form of stimulation to the brain;
- stress produces chemicals which are detrimental to learning, on the contrary, a relaxed brain produces chemicals instrumental in effective learning – teachers and schools should strive to provide stress-free environment;
- studies of **circadian rhythms** (24-hour cycle in the biochemical, physiological, or behavioural processes) show, for example, that young children need about one hour after waking up before their brains are prepared for learning. With adolescents this period is increased to three hours. They also show that learning levels drop around midday (esp. with younger children), and that learning performance is seriously slowed down in the afternoon. (Cohen et al., 2004:176)

Future research will no doubt reveal much more and it is not unrealistic to hope that the implications of neuroscience for learning hold much promise. Meanwhile, many quacks will abuse the natural human tendency to exaggerate with an air of the supernatural the effect and importance of something that is shrouded with mystery but little understood by most, and develop guaranteed ‘miraculous’ methods for learning. No such method, however, has yet been found particularly effective. But the numbers of students who have fallen for the trap are staggering.

7.2. Lateralization of the brain

The theory of lateralization of the brain postulates that as the brain develops, some of its functions are assigned to either the left or the right hemispheres. For language, Obler and Gjerlow (1999) suggest that the **left hemisphere** specializes in morphology, most lexical knowledge, function words and inflections, syntax, phonology, tone systems, and the **right hemisphere** specializes in pragmatic abilities, some lexical knowledge, nonliteral meaning and ambiguity, visuospatial information, nonverbal, and intonation. They, however, stress

that they “no longer expect that there are language areas that are entirely “responsible” for language, or even “dominant” for language, to be contrasted with areas that have nothing to do with it” (1999:11). Neurological studies also show that the left hemisphere is the centre of intellectual, logical and analytical functions, whilst the right hemisphere is the centre of emotions and social needs. It is believed that, whilst language is usually controlled by the left hemisphere, much of SLA happens in the right hemisphere, and that the SL learner can be helped, and this has been proved by several studies, by the employment of right-brain activities.

Studies show that in most people one side of the brain is usually **dominant**. Consequently, people perform better at certain skills associated with either one or the other hemisphere. Brown (2007a:125), amongst others, warns that “whilst we can cite many differences between left- and right-brain characteristics, it is important to remember that the left and right hemispheres operate together as a team”, and that current research on the topic is not all that conclusive. The theory of left- and right-brain dominance, however, works as another reminder of the differences between learners, and the constant need for teachers to try and deploy different methods for different students in an attempt to understand their preferred styles of learning. In the classroom environment this means a big call for a variety of stimuli, methods, and approaches. But also a reminder of the fact that whilst learning is a social skill, the classroom is something of a compromise.

7.3. Memory

Memory is the capacity of the brain to store information. There are various models of how memory works, but they generally agree on the fact that there are two basic types of memory:

- memory for temporary storage; and
- memory for permanent or long-term storage.

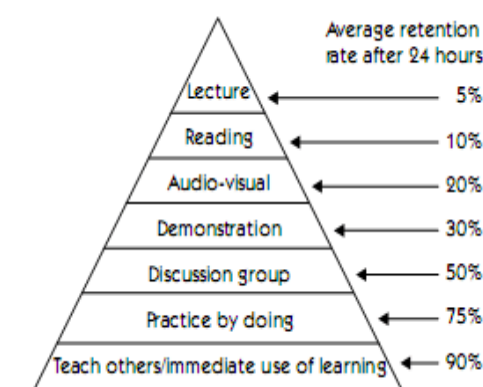
Temporary storage is performed by **short-term memory** and **working memory**. The time span of **short-term memory** is reckoned to be about 15–30 seconds, 5 seconds for images. This is where information is kept while analysis and interpretation of the information happens. **Working memory** has a longer span than short-term memory, it allows for the formation of long-term memories. This is where information is processed to form the basis of other tasks like learning or comprehension. It is made up of the **articulatory loop** (for storing verbal information), and the **visuospatial sketchpad** (for storing visual information), and it is controlled by a **central executive system**. Whilst intensive repetition can place information in working memory, it does not automatically make it part of the long-term memory. This explains why information intensively learned before an exam can be forgotten soon after.

Permanent storage is provided by **long-term memory**. Some researchers believe that here information is stored forever, even though accessing it might be a problem. Others say that some memories are more long-term than others. For information to become part of the long-term memory it has to follow certain paths or, as Sprenger (1999:50) calls them, **memory**

lanes. They store explicit or implicit memory. **Explicit memory** is voluntary. It is formed by semantic and episodic memory. **Implicit memory** is involuntary. It is formed by procedural, automatic and emotional memory.

Semantic memory stores information acquired by means of language. If learning is to happen here, many repetitions have to be carried out. Besides that, it also relies on stimulation by associations, comparisons and similarities. Words are thought to be stored here according to their semantic properties. **Episodic memory** (also called spatial or contextual memory) stores information connected with locations. **Procedural memory** stores information about the body positions and movement. **Automatic memory** (also called conditioned response memory) stores stimuli that trigger off certain reactions. **Emotional memory** stores emotions and feelings.

Sprenger (1999:64) claims that the most powerful learning comes from using as many of the five lanes at a time as possible and advises teachers to deploy strategies which allow that. This is corroborated by the concept of the learning pyramid, which shows that the least effective learning methods (with regard to retention after 24 hours) are lecture (only 5% retention) and reading (10%). As Cohen et al. (2004:175) suggest, this is because only one sensory input is involved – listening (lecture) and vision (reading). As we employ instructional methods that challenge more sensory inputs, retention dramatically increases.



The Learning Pyramid (Cohen et al. 2004:175)

The implications of the learning pyramid for teaching consist in **reducing** passive learning, lectures and the reliance on reading; in **increasing** multi-sensory, active, collaborative, co-operative and peer group learning; and in **increasing** learner co-teaching, applied learning and student talk and interaction. Other methods that seem effective in the storing of information in the long-term memory are those that make connections between prior knowledge and new materials. It is generally believed that memory needs triggers – hence contextual learning is essential (recall of information is activated by the right trigger) and drills, for example, are not effective as they are free of context and use very few channels.

Strategies which are recommended for memorization include **chunking** (learning items in sections, groups, categories and patterns, as this allows easier recall); **association**

(connecting and linking information), and **mnemonics**. And, following Anderson's (1983) suggestion that "the probability of storage is a function of the number of times an item enters short-term memory", repetition and revision clearly play an important role in remembering. Hence, activities that recycle already acquired items and skills are highly beneficial for the learner. Other strategies are discussed in Seminar 11.

Jordan, Carlile and Stack (2008:50) list several strategies for short-term memory, working memory and long-term memory. For short-term memory they recommend that the teachers should "limit the number of lists or items to be committed to memory at one time; be aware that learners remember first and last items on a list better than central ones; group items into 'chunks' with less than ten items to be memorized at one time; be conscious of interference between different types of information to be learnt; use repetition or maintenance rehearsal to retain information for a short period."

As regards working memory, the recommended strategies include "telling learners which information is most important; beginning with an overview or outline of the material to be learnt; stating the objectives or learning outcomes of a learning session; developing automaticity and speed of response in learners through regular practice; encouraging learners to use the knowledge they already possess; encouraging reflection and meta-cognition; linking difficult-to-remember items to more meaningful ones; encouraging visualization (using image representations); using verbal memory aids such as mnemonics; using mind-mapping techniques; using guided questioning to activate existing schemata and concepts; matching encoding strategies with material to be learned; understanding that learners may need to make schemata explicit and challenge their own assumptions; presenting content in increasing order of complexity; revisiting topics to strengthen retention."

For long-term strategies they suggest that teachers "link materials to cues that can be used to recall them; remind learners that cues are sufficient to recall the material; encourage learners to create their own cues; teach revision techniques; encourage learners to discover and use their strengths and styles."

Seminar 7 – student interaction:

1. How would you as a teacher use the information about circadian rhythms? Do you find that circadian rhythms apply to you?
2. Why are there so many myths about the way our brain works? Why do so many people abuse it? Why does anyone believe them?
3. Have you considered yourself as a left-/right-brain person? Does the knowledge help you in life?
4. What is the function of short- and long-term memory? Do you find a parallel with the way computer memory works?
5. Explain the significance and application of the learning pyramid. What is your own personal experience of the effectiveness of the individual modes of instruction?

Seminar 7 – student presentations:

1. Left and right brain dominance
2. Second-language attrition

Seminar 7 – literature:

- Anderman, E. et al.** (2009) *Psychology of Classroom Learning*, Macmillan Reference USA
- Anderson, J. R.** (1983) *The architecture of Cognition*, Harvard University Press
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- Erlauer, L.** (2003) *The Brain-Compatible Classroom, Using what we know about learning to improve teaching*, ASCD
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Chapter 8

Seminar 8 – Teaching methods

Aims:

- to introduce the concept of methods and their development;
- to describe the principles of the most influential methods in the history of language teaching, discuss their merits and shortcomings, and provide a brief overview of the techniques and procedures they typically deploy;
- to provide an introduction to eclectic approaches and post-method pedagogy.

Objectives:

The students gain an insight into the development of methods of language teaching throughout the history and their theoretical bases. They learn to appreciate the recurrent trends and fashions, and adopt an informed, eclectic approach to teaching. They come to understand the foundations of post-method pedagogy.

8.1. Teaching methods

Research has shown that the traditional view of teaching as a realization of a concrete method is rather problematic. First of all, it is not easy to define what a method should be. Most often it is seen as “a practical realization of an approach” (Harmer 2001b:62), where approach is a description of FLA and the prerequisites for successful learning. Methods then deploy various techniques and procedures (sequences of techniques) which are designed to aid the acquisition of various language skills within the descriptive framework of the overall approach. Many researchers and practitioners, however, interchange the terms, and we frequently find, for instance, the label method used as a reference to a technique or a procedure. And a more recent trend uses ‘methodology’ instead of a method, whilst method rather fits the definition of a procedure. This terminological confusion speaks of the fact that it is difficult, or rather impossible, to make clear-cut boundaries between the various theories of teaching, especially as teachers – whether present or past – often combine various approaches which, by definition, should belong to different methods.

Having an overview of the historical division of methods or methodologies is, however, of more than just a historical interest. It traces the development of teaching theories and theories of L2A, and it equips teachers with an understanding of the principles of current teaching methodologies and how they have developed. It also serves as a prime example of how (and whether!) language teaching incorporates theories of language and learning.

8.1.1. The Grammar-Translation Method

The **grammar-translation method** (GTM) (or **classical** method as it was originally used for the teaching of classical languages) can best be summed up by the words accuracy, grammar, memorization (of both vocabulary and grammar rules), translation, written exercises. Its aim was to give the student the ability to read in and translate from a foreign language. The development of communicative skills was ignored. There was no interest in the spoken language. Teaching happened mostly in the native language. It is a teacher-centred method, it is not based on any theory of SLA, yet, it has been one of the most influential ones, and also one which has suffered most criticism. Teachers these days are becoming aware again of how important translation is and how many different functions it may serve, and some of the techniques of the grammar-translation method are making a comeback. In a small research I carried out amongst the students of English at Charles University Prague (proficiency level C1–C2), a high proportion of respondents (16 out of 19) claimed to have found translation drills to be the most effective technique they used during their self-study. I have experienced similar results in all of my previous 20 years' teaching practice. More research here is needed so that some of the GTM techniques can be pardoned and yet again legitimately become available to any teachers who can use them well.

8.1.2. The Direct Methods

The **direct method**, whose foundation stones were laid by Lambert Sauveur and which was made famous by the efforts of Maximilian Berlitz¹, allows only the use of the target language as the language of instruction. Translation is strictly proscribed. It is based on a theory that SLA is essentially very similar to L1A, and hence it employs activities in which there is a lot of oral interaction and spontaneous use of the language. Spoken language is of utmost importance, and it is always presented first before introducing written text. Grammar is taught inductively (no explicit rules are given). Vocabulary is taught through pictures and demonstration, and it is seen as more important than grammar. Pronunciation is practised. Accuracy is important. The method concentrates on everyday language (it was originally developed for the teaching of immigrants to the USA who needed a crash course into the basics of the language). It is a language-centred method. The teacher and the students are partners in the teaching/learning process. The method has several drawbacks: it heavily relies on native-speaker teachers; it has no basis in an SLA theory; in avoiding explanations in the L1, the teachers often waste time in trying to explain or demonstrate what could be very simply and efficiently translated or expressed in the learners' own language.

8.1.3. The Oral Approach

The founders of the Oral Approach, H. Palmer and A. S. Hornby, were very much aware of the afore-mentioned limitations of the direct method and of its lack of a methodological basis. They set out to develop a method which would be scientifically based. Central to their theory was the belief that vocabulary played a key role in language learning, and they took the most frequent words of English as the core for language teaching. One of the outcomes of their research, was the publication of the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of*

¹Berlitz himself never referred to the method as direct, in fact he only used the term Berlitz Method.

Contemporary English, which uses the core vocabulary of a mere two thousand words to provide all of its definitions. And it was the knowledge of this vocabulary which was believed to be central to the learners' ability to cope with the reading of texts. As for grammar, sentence patterns were classified and taught to the learners using a carefully graded oral approach. The best illustration of the method can be found in Hornby's *Oxford Progressive English Course for Adult Learners* (1954–56).

8.1.4. Situational Language Teaching

The Oral Approach enjoyed immense popularity in Great Britain. In Australia, it became the foundation of Situational Language Teaching (developed by G. Pittman). It also worked with carefully selected lexical and grammatical core, but it introduced and practised new language in situations in which the practised structures would be naturally used. Rules were to be induced from the usage in these situations. The method led to the development of the PPP model (Presentation–Practice–Production) of introducing new language

8.1.5. The Audio-Lingual Method

The **audio-lingual method** is an extension of the direct method enriched with the findings of behaviourist psychology. It is based on the principle of stimulus → reaction → reinforcement (reward). The learner is expected to form language habits by frequently repeating correct utterances and being rewarded for doing so correctly. The most common form of exercise is drills, mimicry, memorization and overlearning. Grammar is taught inductively with no rules being given. Not much attention is paid to contents and the naturalness of the language used. In fact, the texts used are written specifically for the purpose of teaching. The method does not make use of authentic texts. The teacher is both a model for imitation, and a class-leader controlling his students. The best teachers were those who followed the prescribed textbook sequences as closely as possible. The students were to comply with the directions of the teacher. This is a language-centred and teacher-centred method with a strong base in structural linguistics and behaviourism. It originated in the USA, and it was also there that it was strongly rejected when Chomsky repudiated the processes of structuralist descriptions of language, and the very idea that language learning could be seen as a process of habit formation.

8.1.6. Community Language-Learning

In **community language-learning** (CLL) the teacher acts as a counsellor who helps the students overcome their negative feelings and fears, and makes them learn by feeling positive and by understanding their own learning and accepting responsibility for it. The students are encouraged to learn the language communicatively. The native language is used to provide literal equivalents, often this is done so by the counsellor who supplies the correct utterance the speaker wants to say, and then elicits an accurate repetition. Conversations are often recorded and analysed later. Mistakes are not pointed out, the teacher simply repeats an incorrect utterance correctly. This is a teacher-student-centred method as both the teacher and the students are decision makers. The principles of CLL have recently been adopted in the internet-based social network services – learners form groups where they help each other with their language-learning problems.

8.1.7. Suggestopaedia

Suggestopaedia works with the principle that if we want to learn we first have to remove the psychological barriers that we have set up for learning (a process of “desuggestion”²). This is also referred to as lowering the affective filter. This was partly achieved by establishing a very comfortable atmosphere in the classroom. In such an environment the students were expected to learn both consciously and subconsciously, for example through peripheral learning facilitated by the use of language related posters in the classroom. One of the teacher’s primary tasks is to increase the students’ faith and confidence in their success. The students work with dialogues in the target language and their translations in the mother tongue. This is done in several phases, and the acquired skills are eventually “activated” by means of various activities. No great emphasis is put on grammar, but the acquisition of vocabulary is paramount.

8.1.8. Total Physical Response

The method called **Total Physical Response** (TPR) is based on the theory that foreign languages are acquired much in the same way as the mother tongue³. Similarly to children, who learn the language by listening and doing, the students listen to and carry out commands issued by the teacher. Initially, they just do that and do not produce any language. Eventually, when the students are ready, roles may be reversed and the students can issue commands to the others or to the teacher. The method was designed to make people enjoy learning languages and reduce the stress which some learners associate with it. Grammar and vocabulary are more important than any other aspects. Only major errors are corrected. The method has limited use beyond the beginning stages of proficiency.

8.1.9. The Silent Way

The **Silent Way** is based on an acquisition theory which claims that language is not learned through a process of habit formation but of rule formation. The learner is supposed to discover the rules of the language by means of cognitive processes. He is seen as someone who discovers and creates the language, rather than somebody who memorizes and repeats. The teacher is silent most of the time. He sets situations which are supposed to raise language awareness. Communication happens mainly between the individual students. Grammar is not taught, errors are seen as a natural part of learning. It is a method which promotes autonomy as it encourages the students to take responsibility for their own learning.

8.1.10. Communicative Language Teaching

For **communicative language teaching** (CLT) interaction is everything. The method is based on both cognitive and natural approaches. It recognizes the social context of language and its functions. Language is a tool. Content is more important than form. All activities are to

²Consequently, the method is nowadays commonly called *Desuggestopaedia*.

³ The method was greatly influenced by Krashen’s Natural Approach, a method which postulated that learners should go through a silent period when they just receive the language and delay its production until it naturally emerges as a result of the students’ feeling ready to use it actively.

have a communicative purpose. The goal of the method is to make students attain communicative competence, to learn how to use language. Tasks are supposed to involve the students in authentic activities, using authentic texts. Fluency is usually more important than accuracy. The teacher is most often simply a guide. The CLT is historically one of the most influential methods as it moved the focus from language form to language use and communication on all levels of proficiency.

8.1.11. Task-based Learning

In **task-based learning**, attention is paid to the performance of meaningful tasks in the target language. The completion of the task is divided into three stages. First, the teacher presents the tasks and suggests useful language that might be needed. The students engage in performing the task whilst the teacher observes. Then the students tell the others how they performed the task and describe what happened. The teacher then provides an analysis, and some practice might follow. Language is seen as a means to an end.

8.1.12. Eclectic Methods

Many teachers will readily declare a strict allegiance to a concrete method, and yet classroom reality is often in stark contrast with their claims and beliefs – teachers are often found randomly selecting whatever techniques they find appropriate, and in doing so they frequently act against the core principles of their “chosen” method. This is no doubt caused by the very nature of language teaching, which is varied and involves so many different factors that a single teaching method is likely to be viewed as rather restrictive. Teachers have long been aware of this limitation, and as a remedy they have set about evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of various methods in an attempt to pinpoint what is best in them. This process, aptly called eclectic, relies heavily on the teacher’s instinct and experience, but it is often ill-informed, and the choice of techniques is “random” (Widdowson 1990:5), and as such it has “no merit whatsoever” (ibid.). There has, indeed, been considerable criticism of the Eclectic Methods. Most notably, Stern (1992) (1992:4) condemns it on the grounds of it not offering concrete criteria for evaluating methods, and for not being founded on concrete principles and findings of SLA research. So, while eclecticism in its undogmaticism frees the hands of the practitioners, it provides

8.2. Post-method pedagogy

There have been other methods which might be mentioned here, and there no doubt will be many more in the years to come. The advent of methods is motivated by research in the fields of psychology, psycholinguistics and applied linguistics, but also by trends and fashions, and by business interests of publishers. Teaching is, however, far too complex an affair for it to be defined by a simple label. The concept of a method is the work of theoreticians, whilst experienced teachers in the classroom use a variety of methods, applying an eclectic approach. Kumaravadivelu (2003) speaks of **post-method pedagogy** and suggests macrostrategies for language learning which include “maximizing learning opportunities, minimizing perceptual mismatches, facilitating negotiated interaction, promoting learner autonomy, fostering language awareness, activating intuitive heuristics, contextualizing linguistic input, integrating language skills, ensuring social relevance, raising cultural consciousness, and monitoring teaching acts”. Some of these are more readily applicable to the area of second rather than foreign language acquisition, but the

overall focus is clearly on the learner and his specific needs, on seeing teaching as a creation of a learning environment, on encouraging autonomy whilst raising language and cultural awareness.

In an attempt to identify the key concepts in most methods Harmer (2001b:78–79) lists the following six “strands” as the basis of contemporary teaching: (1) **affect** (taking into account students’ feelings and attitudes), (2) **input** (constant exposure to the target language, and focus on form especially in the initial stages), (3) **output** (employing meaning-focussed tasks so that students can activate what they have learnt), (4) **cognitive effort** (developing metacognition and learning about how language works), (5) **grammar and lexis** (and showing how they combine), (6) **how, why and where** (knowing what we want to achieve, who our students are and in what context we teach and learn).

Both Kumaravadivelu’s concept of post-method pedagogy and Harmer’s description of contemporary teaching show a clear trend for teaching to be learner-centred, communicative but not ignoring correct forms, contextual and meaningful. We seem to be at the dawn of an age in which the teachers’ right to judge which methods are appropriate for their students is coming to be more generally recognized. At the same time, the current age seems to be far too concerned with testing, which will no doubt have a considerable effect on the shape of language teaching in the years to come. Some of the future methods are likely to be linked to the development of technology in language teaching. Multiculturalism and multilingualism are also likely to be influential factors.

Seminar 8 – student interaction:

1. Match typical activities/concepts with the individual teaching methods.

audio-lingual method	conversation practice
CLL	do as the teacher tells you
CLT	expansion drill
desuggestopedia	information gap
direct method	peer correction
grammar translation method	peripheral learning
Silent Way	students listen to recordings of their own utterances
TPR	translation of a literary passage

Solution:

translation of a literary passage – grammar translation method
 conversation practice – direct method
 expansion drill – audio-lingual method
 students listen to recordings of their own utterances – CLL
 peripheral learning – desuggestopedia
 do as the teacher tells you – TPR
 peer correction – Silent Way
 information gap – CLT

2. Discuss the relevance of some of the techniques typical of the grammar-translation method in contemporary teaching.
3. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using translation in language teaching.

4. Which methodology did your own teachers follow? Which of their techniques did you find effective and ineffective?
5. Give examples of how various trends in the history of psychology affected language teaching methods. Which methods were influenced by theories of SLA?
6. Try to identify some of the reasons why the champions of various language teaching methods are often very critical of other methods. What is the possible solution?

Seminar 8 – student presentations:

1. History of language teaching before Comenius
2. Comenius and language teaching

Seminar 8 – literature:

- Bade, M.** (2008) 'Grammar and Good Language Learners', in: Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008) *Lessons from Good Language Learners*, Cambridge University Press
- Brown, H. D.** (2007a) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Brown, H. D.** (2007b) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Howatt, A. P. R. and H. G. Widdowson** (2009) *A History of English Language Teaching*, OUP
- Knapp, K. and B. Seidlhofer** (ed.) (2009) *Handbook of foreign language communication and learning*, Mouton de Gruyter
- Kumaravadivelu, B.** (2003) *Beyond Methods, Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*, Yale University Press
- Kumaravadivelu, B.** (2006) *Understanding Language Teaching*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Larsen-Freeman, D.** (2000) *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press
- Nation, I.S.P.** (1990) *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*, Heinle & Heinle
- Nation, I.S.P.** (2001) *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, Cambridge University Press
- Richards, J. S. and T. S. Rodgers** (1999) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press
- Richards, J. C. and W. A. Renandya** (ed.) (2002) *Methodology in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press
- Stern, H. H.** (1991) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press
- Tajeddin, Z.** (2008) 'Functions and good language learners', in: Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008) *Lessons from Good Language Learners*, Cambridge University Press

Chapter 9

Seminar 9 – Interlanguage, and what there is to teach

Aims:

- to introduce the concepts of **interlanguage**, **fossilization**, **input**, **intake**, **output** and **interference**;
- to discuss the significance of **errors** and **error analysis** in the development of our understanding of SLA processes;
- to define the content of FLT – **language skills**, **language forms** and **functions**.

Objectives:

The students acquire a perspective of LT and SLA which sees language errors as important developmental steps which mark the progress of the learner. In the practical section of the seminar, they learn basic techniques of error correction, and the classification of the subject matter of LT into language skills, forms and functions.

9.1. Interlanguage

On a developmental scale, the learning of a FL happens in three stages – initial, transitional, and final. The initial stage is marked by a complete or near-complete communicative incompetence, whilst the final stage by a complete or near-complete communicative competence. The intermediary stage is what is generally called **interlanguage** (IL) or **learner language**. Smith (1994:7) defines it as the “systematic linguistic behaviour of learners of a second or other language”. It is typically marked with errors, which were at one point seen as signs of failure and are now understood as important signs of the developing competence, the indication of what has been learnt and what not. As Brown (2007a:256) points out, “correct production yields little information about the actual linguistic system of the learner”. It is through the analysis of errors that our understanding of the features of the IL can deepen our understanding of language learning. This is called error analysis. But before we discuss the common findings of this process, let us look at the features of IL.

The development of IL is most strongly influenced by the **transfer** of knowledge from L1 to L2. There are two basic types of transfer – **positive transfer**, in which the application of L1 rules results in a correct structure in L2, and a **negative transfer**, in which the effect of L1 results in an incorrect utterance in L2. This affects all language forms (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc.).

Interlanguages (irrespective of the combination of L1 and L2) are in many ways similar. Saville-Troike (2006) claims that ILs are **systematic** (the learner possesses a set of internal rules which reflect his level of proficiency), **dynamic** (the learner's knowledge of L2 undergoes a continuous change), **variable** (despite its systematicity, the IL also changes depending on the context), and **reduced** (the learner possesses a smaller range of forms and functions compared to his L1).

Selinker (1972) notes that the IL which children develop when acquiring their mother tongue is different from the IL developed by a L2 learner. Some of the contributing factors here are the L1-L2 transfer, the effect of how L2 is taught, the learner's learning and communication strategies, overgeneralization of acquired rules, and frequently also **fossilization** (ie the cessation of development before the norms of the target language are reached). One of the major differences consists in the fact that children almost always succeed in acquiring L1 completely, whilst L2 learners rarely acquire L2 to a comparable extent.

Corder (1973) describes the development of IL in four stages: 1. **presystematic** (little awareness of the TL rules); 2. **emergent** (some internalization of the TL rules); 3. **systematic** (consistent production, awareness of mistakes); 4. **postsystematic** (few mistakes, ability to self-correct). Brown (2007a:268), however, points out that such a division can be misleading as various language skills might develop at a different rate, and thus there might be significant overlaps of these stages. More importantly, perhaps, this division concentrates too much on production errors and gives little idea of the learner's global competence.

9.2. Errors and error analysis, input and intake

The traditional approach to errors (and let us now leave aside the rather problematic definition of what an error actually is) as the stumbling blocks in the learning process owes much of its existence to the behaviourist understanding of language learning as a process of habit formation. For behaviourists errors are bad habits which will easily fossilize, and then there is no help. The cognitive perspective is very different in that it sees language learning as a process of rule formation during which errors are not only inevitable, but also instrumental in providing feedback to teachers, researchers, and the learners themselves, who can, through the medium of their own errors, adjust their internal sets of linguistic rules.

The topic of error analysis moved to the very centre of attention of SLA research¹. Three more key terms were defined: **input** (the language to which the learner is exposed and from which he learns, the linguistic environment of the learner), **intake** (the part of input which is learnt), and **output** (the language the learner produces). Smith (1994:8) notes that the concept of **input** is problematic as we do not know precisely how much of the linguistic data that the learner is exposed to he can actually process. We also do not know how input is processed and how it becomes intake. Nevertheless, it clearly is one of the key factors in language acquisition.

¹See for example L. Dušková's influential essay "On sources of error in foreign language learning."

There are different theories of how input functions. For instance, Krashen's **input hypothesis** differentiates between acquisition and learning and stresses the importance of "meaningful input", i.e. input which is relevant to the learner's interests and is comprehensible (even though it should slightly exceed the level of the learner's TL). Or **interaction studies**, which postulate that the learner processes the input and negotiates its meaning and form through interaction (e.g. asks for rephrasing). Input cannot be successfully converted into intake without the production of output, which gives the learner a chance to test his hypotheses about the TL and monitor where the gaps in his knowledge are. Here the learner also activates whatever he has learnt, ideally, as Harmer (2001b:78) points out, through the application of meaning-focussed tasks. This can be done both productively in speech and writing, and receptively in listening or reading for meaning.

This is the area where errors occur. Firstly, however, it is also useful to make a distinction between errors and mistakes. **Mistakes** are generally caused by memory lapses and various psychological factors (e.g. tiredness, lack of attention etc.). They occur accidentally, and as such are not systematic and are not part of the interlanguage. The learner usually realizes he has made a mistake and is capable of correcting it. On the other hand, **errors** are systematic. They are signs of incomplete knowledge, not just mere slips of the tongue. The learner might not always be aware he has produced an error and he will not be able to correct it. But sometimes this distinction is not entirely clear, and without the learner correcting his mistake the teacher might not know if he is dealing with an error or a mistake.

Perhaps more importantly, as Corder (1973) suggests, we should distinguish between errors at the sentence level – **overt errors** (ungrammatical), and errors at the level of discourse – **covert errors** (grammatically correct but inappropriate in the context). There are also "hidden" errors which do not manifest themselves in the active production of the TL as the learner simply avoids using structures he recognizes as difficult (*avoidance strategy* is generally classed as part of the learner's communication strategies system).

There are different reasons for errors. Most frequently these are:

- language transfer (both first language and also other language transfer) – interference;
- intraference – due to conflicting pattern within the TL;
- teaching induced errors (these are not only errors introduced by teachers, but also by the teaching method);
- overgeneralization (a newly acquired rule or pattern is applied globally);
- affective variables.

Teachers should always try to recognize and understand the reason for errors, as this might influence the direction of further teaching.

9.3. Attitude to errors and error correction

Errors have now come to be seen as inevitable, natural and integral parts of the learning process. But it has not always been the case. Traditionally, learners were corrected nearly

all the time and usually at the expense of meaningful communication. The learners would often feel inhibited or stunted, afraid of making a slip to such an extent that many would rather not say anything. The focus on accuracy was often also at the expense of comprehension. In classrooms where overcorrection was the rule, learners would rarely reach fluency and communicative confidence. And teachers would soon often be preoccupied with errors to such an extent that they would not reward correct utterances sufficiently.

The attitude to errors propounded by the communicative method was the other extreme. Meaning-based instruction was above anything else, and especially above form. The results, and also later research, confirmed the initial suspicions of some teachers that not caring sufficiently about the form would lead to early fossilization of errors. And, indeed, in our classrooms we regularly see students who communicate with a considerable degree of fluency, but who lack accuracy and are at a loss as to how to root out errors which impede their further progress.

So what attitude to errors and their correction should teachers have? First of all, they should accept that learning without mistakes would not be learning. Then they should clarify their attitudes to accuracy so that they find the right balance between errors they correct and work on, and those they allow to happen without interfering. Lightbown and Spada (1999:106) make a very important point: "Teachers and researchers do not face a choice between form-based and meaning-based instruction. Rather, our challenge is to determine which features of language will respond best to form-focussed instruction, and which will be acquired without explicit focus if learners have adequate exposure to the language. In addition, we need to develop a better understanding of how form-based instruction can be most effectively incorporated into a communicative framework."

So, on the one hand, there is the need to decide on the method of instruction, on the other hand teachers must have a strategy for error correction. As has been said above, too much correction can lead to the learner's unwillingness to communicate and a lack of self-confidence, too little correcting might reinforce errors and be counterproductive in the long run. The choice of strategies is not small. Teachers can correct straight away or later, they can ignore some errors, they can induce self-correction or peer correction, they can be explicit or just rephrase an incorrect utterance (echo). But they ought to be sensitive, reassuring and encouraging at the same time, and they should correct gently and sensibly, and reward correct utterances. They should also be aware that some learners benefit from error treatment and form-focussed instruction whilst others do so only to a lesser degree or not at all. A practical overview of basic techniques of error correction can be found in Edge (1996), and Bartram and Walton (1991).

9.4. Language skills, language forms and language functions

9.4.1. Language skills

Let us now briefly outline the scope of foreign language instruction. There are four language skills which are seen as central by most teaching methods. These are listening, reading, speaking, and writing (many theoreticians include also translating and interpreting). Speaking and writing are **productive skills**. Listening and reading are

receptive skills, which is not to say that they are passive skills as they greatly depend on active participation as well. As we have seen above, some of the teaching methods of the past had a tendency to neglect certain language skills. The goal of current language teaching is to develop (and assess) all four. The emphasis is put on **integration**² of all four skills, rather than a separate approach to them individually. A typical example of an activity that provides a real-life integration of all four skills might be for instance a task in which students are to write a letter of advice to a person based on listening to his own description of his problem, reading a possible solution in a manual, discussing the application of the solution in a group, and then compiling the final letter of advice. Such activities are not only a means of integrating skills, but they are also a means of connecting language with the way the students think and act.

Brown (2007b:234) lists five models of teaching that enable skill-integration:

1. **content-based instruction** (combination of learning of a specific subject matter and language learning);
2. **theme-based instruction** (using topics as themes through which language is learnt);
3. **experiential learning** (activities for engaging left- and right-brain, contextualizing language, integrating all skills, giving students concrete experiences through which they discover language principles – learning by doing, and by inductive processes)
4. **the episode hypothesis** (presenting language through gripping, dramatic episodes);
5. **task-based teaching** (see above).

9.4.2 Language forms

The acquisition of skills goes hand in hand with the acquisition of language forms. These are vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, and grammar.

9.4.2.1. Vocabulary

Despite the fact that **vocabulary** has a central role in communication, there have been various trends in the history of ELT which assumed that lexical acquisition would simply happen of its own accord, and hence teachers didn't need to develop any special techniques. Current trends are quite opposite and there is much interest in both psycholinguistic aspects of vocabulary acquisition, and practical ones in developing appropriate strategies for both teaching and learning. Most importantly, research now concentrates on the learner, and how he manages learning. The key questions for the learner are – the selection of vocabulary to learn, learning, and self-evaluation strategies. Besides choosing the most effective strategy, the learner should also make sure he uses newly acquired vocabulary productively. Another decisive factor in vocabulary acquisition is language awareness, in other words, understanding what is involved in knowing a word (i.e. not just knowing the meaning but also knowing how the word is used, what its collocations are etc.). Strategies that have been shown effective include rote learning, using word cards, using mnemonics, guessing from context, guessing from morphology, and the active use of dictionaries. Learners have to be fluent in these strategies, and the teacher should work on developing and practising them on a regular basis.

²This was strongly emphasized by Widdowson (1978), and can be seen as one of the most tangible achievements of CLT.

9.4.2.2. Pronunciation

The acquisition of good **pronunciation** skills is generally seen as a key to being understood, and that is often the goal of pronunciation instruction in language courses. Recent research also shows there is a strong link between production and reception, and that regular pronunciation practice improves listening comprehension skills. The teaching of pronunciation has been influenced by the Critical Period Hypothesis, but later studies revealed that the acquisition of good pronunciation habits is not exclusively linked to age. It is also necessary to point out that good pronunciation skills (i.e. pronunciation accuracy that guarantees intelligibility) are not to be confused with native-like pronunciation. The acquisition of pronunciation is affected by many variables, most notably motivation, aptitude and opportunity. Whilst classroom practice plays a role in attaining pronunciation accuracy, it is essential that the learner takes an active role in both practising and developing appropriate learner strategies. And practice must happen both on segmental and suprasegmental levels. Strategies include mimicry, listening to recordings of one's own voice, listening to recordings of native speakers, and linking pronunciation to spelling.

9.4.2.3. Spelling

Whilst pronunciation has been described as a key to aural intelligibility, spelling is partly a key to intelligibility in reading. Ideally, the acquisition of spelling is linked with pronunciation practice, vocabulary learning and reading. Strategies that have been shown effective for most learners include copying, developing a feeling for the relationship between the spoken and the written form, using mnemonics, and having frequent access to the written language.

9.4.2.4. Grammar

Attitudes to grammar within the context of SLA have changed more frequently and dramatically than anything else in the field. To teach or not teach was a question that troubled many teachers. In the first part of this chapter I outlined the attitude to grammar adopted by some of the main teaching methodologies. As regards the learner, the situation is by no means a simple one. We understand that explicit knowledge about the language is not commensurate with grammar accuracy and that we must find the right balance between prescriptive and descriptive approaches. On the one hand there is the evidence of research which claims that the explicit knowledge of grammar rules might actually impede communication, on the other hand there is the evidence provided by multitudes of learners who achieved mastery through the analysis and more or less intensive practice of traditional grammar rules. Clearly, there are many factors at play here, and they all should be taken into account when trying to find the correct strategy. As with vocabulary, however, grammar must be used productively as well. Bade (2008:179) suggests that learners would be helped by **cognitive strategies** (such as modelling sentences, utilizing rules and also examples, consulting a dictionary, analysing form and meaning, revising grammar points, coping with variations in sentence structure), and **self-monitoring strategies** (such as students recognizing own errors, critiquing/accepting advice from teachers/peers, accepting teachers' feedback, learning to be reflective, students setting their own grammar goals, seeing grammar as an active process). She also strongly advocates consistent integration of grammar instruction into language courses.

9.4.3. Language functions

The development of language functions goes beyond just learning the right vocabulary and grammar. Language functions can be seen as speech acts, and as such their acquisition is influenced by the understanding of the social implications they have. Thus the factors that influence the learner here are his own social experience and intelligence, age, social identity, and also his own cultural and cross-cultural background. Another important factor is the learner's proficiency, as a more advanced learner will have a battery of speech acts unparalleled by that of a less advanced student, they will also show a considerably higher degree of pragmatic transfer from their mother tongue to the target language. However, Tajeddin (2008:188) points out that "a mismatch sometimes exists between learners' language level and their pragmatic competence, indicating a failure to draw on proficiency gains to use speech acts appropriately in different contexts and situations. Therefore, good language learners need greater awareness of the fact that pragmatic competence does not automatically evolve in the process of language learning and that they need a focus on the pragmatic aspect of language."

The acquisition of language functions is the primary concern of notional-functional syllabi, which organize teaching in terms of notions (a context in which people communicate) and functions (a specific purpose for communication within a particular context). The concept was laid out in the 1970s and since then many of its features have found their way into school and textbook syllabi. Research shows (e.g. Tajeddin 2008:190) that the most effective method of instruction here is explicit teaching, during which the students are exposed to examples of functions, have them explained by the teacher, discuss their implications and then engage in relevant practice activities). In their own learning, students have been shown to benefit both from deductive and inductive approaches. Again, the key concept here – no matter whether we are discussing teaching or learning – seems to be the raising of awareness.

Seminar 9 – student interaction:

1. In what ways does a second language learner's interlanguage resemble the developing language of a child acquiring its mother tongue?
2. What are the typical errors made by Czech learners of English as a result of interference.
3. Give examples of linguistic input.
4. In what way can the distinction between errors and mistakes be useful for a language teacher?
5. What different teacher attitudes to errors can you imagine? What are their pros and cons?
6. Design a teaching with integrated skills. Why is skills integration important?
7. Which learner factors affect vocabulary acquisition?
8. What criteria would you choose for your own vocabulary selection? Why?
9. Exemplify the effect of cross-cultural factors on the acquisition of language functions.

Seminar 9 – student presentations:

Ways of correcting errors

recommended source for presentation: Edge, J. (1996) *Mistakes and Correction*, Longman

Seminar 9 – literature:

- Bartram, M. and R. Walton (1991) *Correction*, Language Teaching Publications
- Benati, A. G. (ed.) (2009) *Issues in Second Language Proficiency*, Continuum
- Brown, H. D. (2007a) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
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- Corder, S. P. (1973) *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin
- Dušková, L. (1969) "On sources of error in foreign language learning." *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 4: 11-36.
- Edge, J. (1996) *Mistakes and Correction*, Longman
- Ellis, R. (1985) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford University Press
- Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker (2008) *Second Language Acquisition*, Routledge
- Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008) *Lessons from Good Language Learners*, Cambridge University Press
- Hadfield, J. and C. (2008) *Introduction to Teaching English*, Oxford University Press
- Harmer, J. (2001b) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman
- Johnson, K. (ed.) (2005) *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Knapp, K. and B. Seidlhofer (ed.) (2009) *Handbook of foreign language communication and learning*, Mouton de Gruyter
- Krashen, S. (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Pergamon Press
- Norrish, J. A. (1983) *Language Learners and their Errors*, Macmillan
- Saville-Troike, M. (2006) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press
- Schauer, Gila A. (2009) *Interlanguage Pragmatic Development*, Continuum
- Scrivener, J. (2005) *Learning Teaching*, Macmillan
- Selinker, L. (1972) 'Interlanguage', in: *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10:209–31
- Sharwood Smith, M. (1995) *Second Language Learning: Theoretical Foundations*, Longman
- Swan, M. and B. Smith (2001) *Learner English*, Cambridge University Press

Chapter 10

Seminar 10 – Communicative competence and proficiency

Aims:

- to explore the concepts of **communicative competence** and **linguistic proficiency**;
- to review the various ways of establishing **levels of proficiency**;
- to provide a basic typology of systems for measuring proficiency;
- to introduce the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**.

Objectives:

The students learn to understand the basis of establishing levels of proficiency in a foreign language, the historical development of measuring proficiency and the roots of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

10.1. Communicative competence

Much of second language learning research in the second half of the twentieth century was influenced by Chomsky's concept of *competence* and *performance*. Chomsky defined competence as "the intrinsic tacit knowledge . . . that underlies actual performance", in other words the underlying, hidden representation of language as it exists in the human brain and can give rise to the enormous creativity with which we can produce an infinite number of sentences. Any such exposition is then called *performance*, and in the traditional Chomskyan sense it involves the ability to use grammar, but it takes into account other factors – such as memory – as well. Chomsky's *competence* is more precisely referred to as *linguistic competence*, the underlying knowledge of an idealized native speaker, the tool for distinguishing grammaticality from ungrammaticality. Whilst performance is directly observable, realizing what one's competence truly consists of is practically impossible. This, besides other considerations, has led other linguists (e.g. Halliday, Firth) to dismiss the idea of distinguishing between language as system and language as observable behaviour, and rather concentrate on the analysis of language in use and the instances of language behaviour.

It is important to stress that Chomsky's grammar-based competence does not stand for linguistic ability especially in that it does not go beyond the scope of a sentence, and it does not pay any attention to the use of language within a particular context. Following Jakobson's study of language functions, Dell Hymes, in the 1960s, coined the term *communicative competence*, which sees language within its social context, and not as an

isolated entity. Hymes identified 16 components of communicative competence. To facilitate memorization, he aptly chose the acronym SPEAKING to label the model.

The “S” stands for *setting and scene* (time, place), the “P” for *participants* (speaker, audience), the “E” for *ends* (goals, outcomes), the “A” for *act sequence* (structure, sequencing), the “K” for *key* (clues signifying tone and manner), the “I” for *instrumentalities* (register), the “N” for *norms* (social implications and rules), and the “G” for *genre* (the kind of speech event). Whilst Hymes was primarily a sociolinguist (*ethnography of communication*), his observations had significant implications for SLA research in that they highlight the fact that the second language learner needs to acquire a much wider scope of communicative skills than just the knowledge of rules about the target language. *Linguistic competence* – the knowledge of the rules of grammar – clearly does not suffice as it does not necessarily guarantee successful outcome.

Hymes’ model of sociolinguistic competence was transferred to the area of second language learning, teaching and testing by Canale and Swain, who, unlike Hymes for whom *linguistic* and *communicative competence* were independent of each other, argue that *linguistic competence* is a subset of *communicative competence* as the knowledge of grammar rules is meaningless unless the rules of use can be applied as well. They define the following levels of competence:

- *grammatical* (lexis, morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, phonology) – language as system;
- *sociolinguistic* (sociocultural rules of use) – socio-cultural appropriateness;
- *discourse* (rules of discourse) – textual organization, inter-relatedness;
- *strategic* (verbal and non-verbal communication strategies employed in the event of breakdown in communication) – circumlocution, avoidance, repetition, hesitation, guessing.

Whilst many critics of the proposed system argue that these four levels overlap in many ways, or that *strategic competence* does not “seem to be a separate component but rather a tactical process” (Widdowson 2003:166), the framework spelled a revolution in ELT by marking the advent of communicative language teaching, and by motivating further research in the area of language competence and its testing (e.g. Bachman’s communicative language ability framework, Cook’s concept of *multicompetence* etc.). It identified some of the key areas on which both language teachers, learners and testers must concentrate.

10.2. Defining proficiency

The language teacher and tester as much as the learner or those who might benefit from his knowledge (e.g. employers) are concerned with the learner’s level of proficiency. The concept of proficiency as the degree of skill with which a speaker can use a language is very closely related to that of *communicative competence*. Stern (1991) defines **proficiency** by looking at native-like proficiency. Here it is essential to realize that Stern does not say that L2 proficiency is or should be the same as L1 competence. But, quite simply, it is easier to compare a native speaker with a learner, using the speech of a native speaker as a point of

reference. According to Stern (ibid), native speaker proficiency is marked by:

- the intuitive mastery of the forms of the language (*Sprachgefühl* – a sense of what is right and wrong);
- the intuitive mastery of the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings, expressed by the language forms;
- the capacity to use the language with maximum attention to communication and minimum attention to form;
- the ability to use language both productively and receptively; and
- the creativity of language use.

By mentioning “intuitive mastery” and “minimum attention to form” Stern points out that proficiency is the result of a high degree of internalization of the rules of the language, and maximum level of automaticity which is usually manifested by the speaker’s fluency (not explicitly mentioned by Stern but undeniably implied). But proficiency is not just that. Stern’s “mastery of the forms” translates into accuracy, and the mention of “cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings” highlights the fact that a proficient speaker must be aware of appropriate discourse and pragmatic strategies. By using the native speaker as a point of reference, Stern can claim that his knowledge of the language is not knowledge about the language, but knowledge based on intuition, an “internal system” (p. 345). Stern believes that the SL learner has a similar internal system, which is, however, much more fluid and simple especially in the initial stages of learning. As a result of his comparison Stern stresses that SL proficiency cannot be reduced just to the framework of the traditional four skills.

10.2.1. Levels of proficiency

Historically, there have been different models for assessing the levels of proficiency. The most straightforward way is to determine the speaker’s *linguistic competence* and examine his knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading and listening comprehension. Tests of this sort are relatively easy to prepare and administer but the results are rather meaningless. Knowing that our learner has a perfect command of the present perfect does not reveal anything about his communicative competence. But, again, a theoretically-based, formalistic model of proficiency is a useful point of reference for teachers and testers. The sum of the rules of the language can be divided into groups of equal size, the students know what they are expected to acquire and the whole of the training/acquisition process may start. Some functional aspects or communicative roles can be added, and communication can be tested in an oral interview. This approach lies behind the traditional labels for the different levels of proficiency: beginner (false beginner) – elementary/lower intermediate – intermediate – upper-intermediate – advanced – proficient.¹ However, whilst an experienced teacher can easily imagine what type of performance can be expected at these different levels, the labels themselves do not give any

¹In the USA, another type of labeling has been in use, the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) Language Proficiency Ratings which also distinguishes five levels of proficiency: elementary proficiency, limited working proficiency, minimum professional proficiency, full professional proficiency and native or bilingual proficiency.

guidance to the lay public. Especially employers are at a loss as to how to evaluate the language skills of their job applicants. They need to know if their employees can write simple e-mail messages, answer the telephone, understand a contract, or prepare and present a presentation in a foreign language. The employer is looking for a model of proficiency with regard to the desired outcomes.

Such needs led to the development of proficiency guidelines based on the so-called “**can-do statements**” by which the learner performs a self-evaluation process by trying to assess what he can and cannot do in the target language.

10.2.2. The ALTE Framework

One of the best known models was developed by the *Association of Language Testers in Europe* (ALTE). Established in 1989, it set out to provide the European concept of workforce mobility with a framework of reference for assessing the practical language skills of European citizens which would be applicable to all languages. One of the main objectives of ALTE was to prepare a comparable and fair system of quality language exams which would guide the employer’s expectations, and at the same time the learner’s direction in his future linguistic development.

The ALTE framework consists of six levels (ALTE Breakthrough + ALTE Levels 1–5). Its range of some 400 can-do statements (in 40 categories) provides a detailed description of what a typical language user can do in a particular language, at a particular level and in each one of the four skill areas. At the same time, the framework specifies concrete abilities in different areas such as tourism, work environment and study environment. The framework stresses that it is only illustrative and, hence, not exhaustive or prescriptive. It does not constitute a definition of a particular level, a curriculum or a checklist. The purpose is then quite clear: to offer guidance to the developers of tests in various areas of use (ESP, general proficiency etc.) as the different statements are not relevant in all contexts. One of the potential problems of defining a level in this way is that the learner can be a proficient reader but a poor listener. The framework does not provide any guidance as to how to deal with such discrepancies which are, however, fairly common in real life.

10.2.3. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

One of the most influential descriptions of the different levels of proficiency is contained in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It was compiled by the Council of Europe, and its finalised version (published in 2001) includes six reference levels for grading proficiency which are aligned to the ALTE levels mentioned above. The basic levels match the general concepts of beginner, intermediate and advanced users and form what is referred to as the Global Scale:

Beginner – Basic User (Levels A1 – Breakthrough or beginner & A2 – Waystage or elementary);

Intermediate – Independent Speaker (B1 – Threshold or intermediate & B2 – Vantage or upper intermediate);

Advanced – Proficient Speaker (C1 – Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced & C2 – Mastery or proficiency).

Each level is then described at length with regard to competencies necessary for effective communication; skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies; situations and contexts in which communication takes place. The CEFR also describes in detail what the learner can do in the four skills.

As in the ALTE, the Global Scale is based on a set of can-do statements. Its range is best illustrated by the following quick comparison:

“A1: Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.

C2: Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.” (CEFR 2001)

Students are advised to fill in self-assessment grids so that they can reflect on what their current level is and what they need to do to make further progress. The CEFR, however, deliberately avoids referring to grammar. Instead, it aims to show how learners communicate, and how they process spoken or written texts. The “can-do statements” are seen as complements to specific language areas.

The CEFR provides teachers with useful points of reference, and guidance as to how to assess and compare their learners. It provides concrete, easily understandable goals and in this respect it can also aid the motivation of the learners. In its positive attitude (based on the descriptions of what the learners *can* do and not on what they *cannot* do) it can increase their self-confidence.

At the same time, there are several major drawbacks. The CEFR does not seem to bring any new concrete findings. It gives guidance to teachers but that in itself is nothing new and there is a wealth of literature which is much more thorough in this respect.

The descriptors appear to be detailed at first sight but on inspection they are wordy, vague to the point of contentless, and fairly subjective. If we look at a typical sentence from the CEFR – e.g. “*can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc.*” – it is actually not easy to imagine what type of language it might describe; the terms are general and hard to define. And this applies to most of the document.

Another point the CEFR emphasises is the process of self-evaluation. However, self-evaluation is very subjective and unreliable especially for learners at the low end of the global scale. If we consider the fact that the descriptors are non-conclusive, the successful outcome of the whole self-evaluating process is rather questionable.

The CEFR stresses it is intentionally non-grammatical. Much is yet to be done to convey the appropriate message to the teachers, who are often rather confused and do not know to what extent they should concentrate on the form and accuracy. They are not helped by the fact that the framework has, to a large extent, been abused by many publishers who have ‘borrowed’ the A1–C2 grades and relabelled large numbers of titles in order to keep with the times and the competition and not lose business. In many cases, this has happened mechanically – labels have been printed on books which had been in print for a decade or

longer before the CEFR was finalized. The levels of the global scale have thus been significantly devalued and are now considered by many sceptical professionals rather meaningless.

There is also a significant danger that institutions and the makers of language policies and planning will not understand the framework as the point of reference it claims to be, but rather as a guide to teaching or a doctrine. Encouraged by the endless supply of new textbook titles, schools might tailor their teaching activities to conform with the defined categories. This process (called *washback*) accompanies most exams, but this time it could happen on an unprecedentedly large scale. It will also be interesting to watch how different countries respond to the challenge of implementing the CEFR into the education system – some might be tempted to use it as a panacea for teaching-related problems and fall into the trap of believing that the EU has now found a final solution.

It is the sceptics who say that the whole project is but a political idea turned into a business venture. Time will tell, but let us hope that it is not the case, for business and education make perilous friends.

Seminar 10 – student interaction:

1. In what ways is linguistic competence not a sufficient measure of SL proficiency?
2. Describe as many possible uses of the levels of proficiency as possible.
3. What are the advantages of the CEFR? Can you imagine a better system?
4. In what ways can the CEFR be useful for language teachers?
5. “Business and education make perilous friends.” Discuss.

Seminar 10 – student presentation:

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

recommended source for the presentation: *The Teacher's Guide to the CEF*, Longman 2001

Seminar 10 – literature:

Brown, H. D. (2007a) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (5th Edition), Pearson Education Ltd

Brown, H. D. (2007b) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (3rd Edition), Pearson Education Ltd
Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment, Council of Europe, Cambridge University Press

Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker (2008) *Second Language Acquisition*, Routledge

Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008) *Lessons from Good Language Learners*, Cambridge University Press

Harmer, J. (2001b) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman

Johnson, K. (ed.) (2005) *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, Palgrave Macmillan

Knapp, K. and B. Seidlhofer (ed.) (2009) *Handbook of foreign language communication and learning*, Mouton de Gruyter

Krashen, S. (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Pergamon Press

Norrish, J. A. (1983) *Language Learners and their Errors*, Macmillan

Saville-Troike, M. (2006) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge University Press

Schauer, Gila A. (2009) *Interlanguage Pragmatic Development*, Continuum

Scrivener, J. (2005) *Learning Teaching*, Macmillan

Selinker, L. (1972) ‘Interlanguage’, in: *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10:209–31

Sharwood Smith, M. (1995) *Second Language Learning: Theoretical Foundations*, Longman

Stern, H. H. (1991) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press

Swan, M. and B. Smith (2001) *Learner English*, Cambridge University Press

Chapter 11

Seminar 11 – Communication and learning strategies

Aims:

- to outline the principles of **communication strategies**;
- to provide an overview of **learning strategies**;
- to discuss the place of **learner training** in the curriculum;
- to offer guidance for learner training.

Objectives:

The students should receive an introduction to the concept of communication and learning strategies in order to prepare the ground for the discussion of learner autonomy introduced in the subsequent seminar.

The studies of the *good language learner* discussed in the following chapter focus on some of the reasons why some learners are more successful than others. The studies show that successful learners accept responsibility for their own learning and often develop idiosyncratic ways of learning. The literature gave rise to countless studies analysing the concrete techniques which successful learners make use of. The sets and subsets of these techniques came to be known as strategies.

The general definition of strategy involves the use of military terminology. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* speaks of “the art of planning and directing military activities in a war or battle”, the OED mentions the existence of a conflict and strategy as a “plan for successful action based on the rationality and interdependence of the moves of the opposing participants”. Both definitions allude to the deliberateness involved in strategies, and the COD aptly uses the metaphor of art. Strategy is more than just a way of reaching a goal, it involves structured and skilful premeditation which can make the difference between success and failure. In the world of language learning the term *strategies* describes the whole set of complex patterns of behaviour which the learner systematically and deliberately adopts in order to learn and use the target language. We recognize two different types of strategies: **communication** strategies and **learning** strategies.

11.1. Communication strategies

Sometimes referred to as *communicative* or *compensatory* strategies, these are the techniques the language student applies when his incomplete knowledge is likely to lead to a

breakdown in communication. The concrete techniques might involve circumlocution or paraphrasing, the use of gestures or mime, coining a new word, or simply avoiding the topic or cleverly planning his speech so that problems are avoided. The last point is where advanced learners excel. They have learnt how to avoid mistakes, they know what they can do in a language and what they cannot, and they are adept at moving within the “safe boundaries” of their actual knowledge and ability. There has been some discussion as to whether communication strategies should be taught to language learners. As with anything, there are champions and there are adversaries. The first argue that teaching communication strategies increases the learner’s flexibility in the TL. The latter claim that learners already possess communication strategies from their mother tongue. They argue that in our first language we often run into problems when we are short of a word or cannot communicate in exactly the way we like, and that we apply the same strategies as the SL learner does when he encounters problems.

In my view, the teaching of communication strategies is helpful in that it can make the students see how a single idea can be expressed in several different ways, but I do not believe that it needs to become a regular part of the teaching process. There are many areas in which the learner can stumble: there are mistakes and errors, there are memory slips. They can be induced by psychological factors such as tiredness, stress or lack of attention; external factors such as noise or rush, or simply by inaptitude. In any case, they are largely unpredictable which makes them an unlikely object of systematic teaching.

11.2. Learning strategies

Rebecca Oxford, one of the biggest authorities in the field, defines learning strategies as “behaviours or actions which learners use to make language-learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable” (Oxford 1990). She speaks of “steps” the students take so that they enhance their learning but they are also steps the students take to overcome concrete obstacles. Other authors use terms such as behaviours, techniques or tactics, but they all refer to the same idea of the learner intentionally performing activities with the goal of learning and of attaining communicative competence.

There are various types of strategies and they can all be divided into different categories. Oxford (ibid.) suggested a typology of interrelated learning strategies by distinguishing between:

- **cognitive strategies** – identification, memorization and retrieval of language elements (e.g. various memory techniques; analysing new language and comparing it with what has already been acquired or with L1);
- **metacognitive strategies** – understanding one’s own learning and adopting appropriate strategies for planning learning, and monitoring and evaluating its outcome;
- **affective strategies** – working on one’s motivation and maintaining positive attitude to the TL, managing to control negative emotions;
- **social strategies** – actively participating in the interaction with other users of the language;
- **resource management strategies** – organizing learning, managing time.

A different approach was taken up by Purpura (1999) who linked strategies to comprehending processes, storing/memory processes, and using/retrieval processes, and there are several other taxonomies proposed by other authors (e.g. O'Malley and Chamot, Cohen and Chi). These taxonomies often contain questionnaires for assessing which strategies learners use, and detailed lists of concrete strategies and useful "tips" for learning.

11.2.1. Factors affecting the choice of learning strategies

Research has concentrated on establishing which factors influence the use and the choice of learning strategies. There appear to be considerable differences between children and adult learners, who use more sophisticated approaches. Some studies also show that gender plays a role, reporting that female learners use a much wider range of strategies. Perhaps not surprisingly, the best users of learner strategies can be found amongst highly motivated learners, professional linguists and learners with extended previous experience of learning foreign languages. Ellis (2008) is sceptical: "different populations of learners employ strategies in different ways, suggesting that we cannot expect to find a set of universal good language learning strategies." (p. 713) But perhaps we need not be looking for universality here. The choice of learning strategies is likely to be highly idiosyncratic – what suits one learner might be totally unsuitable to another. Oxford does not share Ellis' scepticism. She believes that learning strategies are one of the main factors determining the success of the learning process. Ellis, on the contrary, points out that available studies do not prove any correlation between proficiency and the use of strategies. But this might perhaps be the result of unreliable methodologies applied by the researchers.

The idea behind learning strategies is attractive. Whilst it is clear that learning success is determined by many other learner factors (such as those discussed in the previous chapters), it would appear reasonable to expect that the learner's attitude to and the actual practice of "going about the business" should have a direct effect on the outcome. The question then arises whether teachers can help their students to become more effective learners by explicitly introducing them to the various techniques. This area of ELT is called *learner training* or *strategy training*.

11.2.2. Strategy training

Strategy training is generally defined within the framework of helping learners, especially those who are less successful, to become more so. There are some caveats here:

- it is difficult to tell whether the successful learner is more successful simply as a direct result of his choice of learning strategies or because of all of the other factors at play, for example his aptitude and motivation;
- we cannot tell whether the successful learner's strategies will be as effective for the poor learner;
- the poor learner might not be able to use the same techniques as they might depend on the learner's aptitude and thus be inaccessible to the poor learner;
- the GLL might be more aware of what he does and thus report strategies that the poor learner uses too but simply not successfully.

Whilst these questions will undoubtedly have to be clarified by further, longitudinal research, it seems clear that strategies could be taught to everyone so that all learners have the freedom to experiment and find what works for them. The teaching process can give the learners a catalogue of strategies to choose from and do so not just for the poor learner but for everybody. The poor learner might be helped and it could have a positive effect on his motivation, the more successful learner could possibly become even more efficient. Despite the caveats, there does not appear to be a good enough reason why learners should not be introduced to whatever might be of use to them.

The teaching of strategies can be explicit or embedded. During **explicit** training the teacher directly introduces the learners to various strategies along with instructions on how to use them and how to monitor the outcome. This is typically applied to the four skills (e.g. practical tips to work on one's listening comprehension skills) and the acquisition of language forms (e.g. grammar, vocabulary). Indirect strategies, i.e. those referring to the organization of learning, are generally introduced through tips or more effectively in classroom discussion. Alternatively, strategy training can be **embedded** into other activities and suitable communicative contexts, and not explicitly taught (e.g. working with a text trying to guess the meaning of unknown words from the context shows the students the different techniques which might help them make correct guesses in the future). Or a mixture of both approaches can be used. Students are often advised to be aware of their own strategies and improve upon them by keeping learning journals and diaries.

Ellis (2008:719) cautiously points out that despite the enormous interest of researchers in the field, there is no direct evidence showing that strategy training is "universally successful", and that the time spent on teaching them and creating suitable activities might not be well spent. What seems to be more important than just having the hard-to-define "know-how" is the willingness to take charge of one's own learning and become an autonomous learner. I endorse this view, despite the fact that in my own classroom experience I found that students genuinely appreciate being given tips on how to learn and that it seems to improve their motivation and willingness to try something new for at least some time.

The discussion will remain open as new, related concepts are being investigated (e.g. self-regulation and learner expertise). But the teacher trainee should be aware of the potential advantages and pitfalls of the concept and follow his common sense – too much classroom time spent on strategy training will reduce the time for other classroom activities, but introducing useful tips for learning and practice can be interesting, inspiring, and thought-provoking and can certainly cause no harm.

Seminar 11 – student interaction:

1. Which communication strategies do you use? Are they always helpful, or have some of them actually turned into bad habits?
2. Describe and discuss how you learn vocabulary in a foreign language. Do you have any special strategies?
3. What other strategies for learning vocabulary have you encountered? Would they work for you? Why (not)?

4. What other learning strategies do you use? How effective are they?
5. Did your language teachers teach strategies? If so, did you find it useful? Discuss.
6. Was there any strategic advice that you feel you would have benefited from but did not receive?
7. What are the possible drawbacks of strategy training? How would you cope with them as a teacher?
8. What is the difference between learner styles and learning strategies?

Seminar 11 – student presentations:

Learning strategies for listening and classroom listening

recommended source for presentation: Richards, J.C. (2005) *Second Language Listening, Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 62-81

Seminar 11 – literature:

- Brown, H. D.** (2007a) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
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- Grenfell, M. and V. Harris** (1999,) *Modern Languages and Learning Strategies*, Routledge
- Hewitt, D.** (2008) *Understanding Effective Learning*, Open University Press
- Hurd, S. and T. Lewis** (ed.) (2008) *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*, Multilingual Matters
- Johnson, K.** (ed.) (2005) *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Jordan, A., O. Carlile and A. Stack** (2008) *Approaches to Learning*, Open University Press
- Kumaravadivelu, B.** (2003) *Beyond Methods, Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*, Yale University Press
- Oxford, R.** (1990) *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*, Wadsworth Publishing Co Inc.
- Richards, J. C. and W. A. Renandya** (ed.) (2002) *Methodology in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press
- Spolsky, B.** (1989) *Conditions for second language learning*, Oxford University Press
- Stern, H. H.** (1991) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press
- Takač, V. P.** (2008) *Vocabulary Learning Strategies and FLA*, Multilingual Matters

Chapter 12

Seminar 12 – Learner autonomy and the good language learner

Aims:

- to introduce the concept of **learner autonomy**;
- to introduce ways in which teachers can help their students take charge of their own learning;
- to explore what we can learn from the “**good language learner**”.

Objectives:

The students learn how they can develop and promote learner autonomy, and how they can apply the findings of the good language learner research in classroom practice.

12.1. Learner autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy is one of the most exciting ones in educational psychology. It is so especially because it forms an underlying principle of all learning, and the goal of education. Little (1994) sees autonomy as a highly desirable state of the human mind (cf Kumaravadivelu’s second stage of autonomy as learning to liberate¹). He describes its benefits in the context of general education – autonomy is the ideal in human psychology as it is the expression of human freedom and self-determination. If we want our students to grow up into autonomous beings we must allow them to be autonomous as learners, to learn to be autonomous.

Learner autonomy as a shift from teacher-centred teaching to learner-centred learning has been spurred by constructivism, cognitive psychology (which avers that the effectiveness of learning is greater when the learner integrates knowledge within a personal framework), educational psychology (which links learner autonomy with learner motivation), and communicative language teaching (which puts so much emphasis on the learner being in the centre of attention).

Learner autonomy is generally defined as the principle that learners should be encouraged

¹Kumaravadivelu (2003) notices that there is a tendency to differentiate between a narrow concept of autonomy (as learning to learn) and a broad one (as learning to liberate).

to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it. Or, as one of the most commonly quoted definitions says, it is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec 1981:3²). For Holec, taking charge means to have and to hold the responsibility (a) for determining learning objectives, (b) for defining contents and progressions, (c) for selecting methods and techniques to be used, (d) for monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and finally, (e) for evaluating what has been acquired.

In an attempt to define learner autonomy, Little (1994:81) starts by saying what it is not:

- “
- It is not a synonym for self-instruction (learning without a teacher).
 - In the classroom context, autonomy does not entail an abdication of responsibility on the part of the teacher; it is not a matter of letting the learners get on with things as best they can.
 - It is not something that teachers do to learners (it is not another teaching method).
 - It is not a single, easily described behaviour.
 - It is not a steady state achieved by learners.”

He goes on to say that it is “essentially a matter of the learner’s psychological relation to the process and content of learning... a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action.”

Kumaravadivelu (2003) similarly stresses the importance of learners working co-operatively with teachers. He recognizes that autonomy is not “context-free” (p. 134) as it depends on the learner’s personality, motivation, his needs and wants, and the constraints of the educational environment. Reaching autonomy depends both on the learner’s awareness of learning strategies and on the teachers’ effectiveness of learner training. Clearly, autonomy is the goal both for the learner and the teacher. What, then, can they do to reach this goal?

Kumaravadivelu (2003) says that learners can first of all identify their strengths and weaknesses as language learners and deploy appropriate learning strategies, especially those that are used by successful language learners. They should try and find as many opportunities to come into contact with the target language using whatever resources are available, and constantly evaluate their language performance to see whether and how well they have achieved their objectives. They should try to get feedback and help from their teachers, and collaborate with other learners. Kumaravadivelu’s description of learner autonomy thus very much resembles that of the good language learner (see below).

As for the teacher’s involvement, he suggests that teachers:

- might consider negotiating with the learners the course content and methodology, if appropriate;
- share with learners, in a way that is accessible to them, the kind of information about language and language learning that teachers have but that is not always passed on to learners;
- encourage discussion in the classroom about language and language learning;

²Holec, H. 1981. *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon

- help learners become aware of the wide range of alternative strategies available to them for language learning;
- create a learning environment where learners feel they can experiment with their language learning;
- allow learners to form their own views about language learning, and respect their points of view;
- counsel and give guidance to individual learners when possible.

He then advocates a gradual formation of autonomy (cf Oxford's stages of autonomy³), starting with raising the learners' awareness of the reasons for the teacher's selection of particular tasks, materials or methods, through allowing students to choose from various options given by the teacher, to allowing the learner to determine his own goals, tasks and materials. I very much endorse his view (p. 145) that "it would be a pedagogically sound practice to build exercises to promote learner autonomy into the overall language teaching curriculum rather than to devote isolated lessons on it." In my own teaching experience I have noticed that this approach not only helps the learners to gain autonomy, but it also strengthens the learner-teacher rapport, as it is a clear demonstration of the fact that the teacher is an informed assistant in the learning process, one who cares whether his students really achieve their goals.

Little (1994) warns of a few potential problems in the implementation of learner autonomy. In his view, autonomy challenges the traditional role of the teacher as the one who is responsible for the achievement of educational goals and for purveying information, which might be a taxing role-change to accept. As for the learners themselves, Little suggests (and so does Oxford 2008:48⁴) that not all learners might want to become autonomous, and responsible for their own learning. Some might refuse to see that the teacher's job is not solely to prepare them for an exam, and, indeed, it might not be more than passing an exam that some students want. He points out that autonomy "implies a continuous challenge to our certainties, which can be very unsettling". For learners to achieve autonomy, he suggests, it is essential that they "become aware of themselves as learners – aware, for

³R. Oxford (2008) explains that there are different levels of autonomy – stages of autonomy, ranging from basic awareness to master-decision making. This claim is in keeping with the Vygotskian social-constructivist theory of stages of internal self-regulation, Nunan's stage theory*, Little's learning spiral**, or the various concepts of autonomy by degree as expounded, for example, by Farmer and Sweeney***.

(* Nunan, D. (1997) *Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy*. In P. Benson and P. Voller (eds) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning* (pp. 192–203). Longman.

**Little, D. (2000b) *Learner autonomy: Why foreign languages should occupy a central role in the curriculum*. In S. Green (ed.) *New Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Modern Languages*. Modern Languages in Practice 13. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

*** Farmer, R. and Sweeney, E. (1994) *Self-access in Hong Kong: A square peg in a round hole?* Occasional Papers in Language Teaching 4 (pp. 24–30). ELT Unit: Chinese University of Hong Kong.)

⁴ Oxford, and many others warn about the fact that this concept of autonomy is rooted in Western philosophy and is not compatible with other cultures.

example, of the learning techniques they instinctively favour and capable of judging how effective those techniques are.” He concludes his treatise by highlighting the broader educational effect of autonomy, that through autonomy learners might learn to be “the artists of their own lives” (p. 86). This is the point that Kumaravadivelu makes when he speaks of the broad view of learner autonomy as the capacity to learn to liberate. In his words “If academic autonomy enables learners to be *effective learners*, liberatory autonomy empowers them to be *critical thinkers*.” Learning here is seen as a meaningful process of not only acquiring knowledge, but also and mainly of acquiring the ability to question, to reason, to gather information with a view to subjecting it to evaluation.

Learner autonomy can yield great results in FLA but its implications are clearly wider. Many researchers, including myself, see it as one of the goals of the educational process. Whilst it might not be a goal achievable by everyone, it is one very much worth pursuing. And if the pursuit of autonomy is seen as a goal by the educational authorities, the chances are that it might be achieved globally. For that to happen, training for learner autonomy must start in the very early stages of the educational process and it should be developed in all school subjects. In my opinion, this would be one of the biggest challenges for the Czech educational system.

12.2. The good language learner

The path to autonomy in language learning leads through adopting the skills of the good language learner (GLL). As has already been pointed out, the two concepts are very close in several aspects.

“Successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner’s own personal investment of time, effort, and attention to the SL in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language.” Brown (2007b:60). Brown here associates the GLL with “successful mastery”, and indeed, the attempts to define who the GLL is and what his major characteristics are is an attempt to explain why some learners are more successful than others. If we know precisely what the GLL does that makes him so good perhaps we can learn a lesson and teach it to other learners who are not as successful. After all, we are born with the ability to learn a language. It must simply be the case of knowing how to go about it so that this innate capacity can be transferred to other languages besides our mother tongue. One of the inherent problems here is determining what we mean by success – is it the ability to get the message across in whatever form, or does it also have to include perfect grammar and large vocabulary? And where do receptive and comprehension skills come in? But let us leave these questions aside for the moment, and look at what factors good language learning seems to depend on.

Rubin (1975) lists three variables – aptitude, motivation and opportunity. As for what the GLL actually does she believes that he is good at guessing and inferring meaning; he is determined to get the message across to the extent that he is willing to appear foolish if the need be, and he is very good at circumlocuting; he attends to form; he tries out the target language as much as possible whether in private or with other speakers; he constantly monitors his speech; he attends to meaning; he has a good store of learning strategies.

Stern (1975) lists ten strategies used by the GLL: 1. Planning strategy, 2. Active strategy, 3. Empathetic strategy, 4. Formal strategy, 5. Experimental strategy, 6. Semantic strategy, 7. Practice strategy, 8. Communication strategy, 9. Monitoring strategy, 10. Internalisation strategy.

According to Harmer (2001a:10), who develops the classroom view of the concept, GLLs share the following characteristics:

- a willingness to listen (not just pay attention but also soak up what they hear with eagerness and intelligence);
- a willingness to experiment (take risks, try things out);
- a willingness to ask questions;
- a willingness to think about how to learn (employing one's own study skills);
- a willingness to accept correction.

He stresses that not all GLLs need to be extroverts, they just simply should feel the urge to use the language. Perhaps his omission of learning strategies is motivated by the fact that recent research in the field gives conflicting results, and that learner training has not been proved very successful. Harmer (2001a), however, stresses that learners should take charge of their learning, that teachers cannot teach students the FL unless they are prepared to do some of the work themselves and co-operate with the teachers.

Brown's list (2007b:209) of the GLL's characteristics contains more points, saying that GLLs:

1. find their own way, taking charge of their learning;
2. organize information about language;
3. are creative, developing a "feel" for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words;
4. make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom;
5. learn to live with uncertainty by not getting flustered and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word;
6. use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned.
7. make errors work for them and not against them;
8. use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language;
9. use contextual cues to help them in comprehension;
10. learn to make intelligent guesses;
11. learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform 'beyond their competence';
12. learn certain tricks that help to keep conversations going;
13. learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence;
14. learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

He then adds (p. 209) that they do not all necessarily have to apply. He also suggests, and

this is a particularly salient point, that for teaching to be truly effective, it should model the behaviour of the GLL.

Rubin (in Johnson 2005:37–64) presents a model called **Learner Self-Management (LSM)** and defines it as “the ability to deploy procedures and to access knowledge and beliefs in order to accomplish learning goals in a dynamically changing environment”. She lists the following characteristics of expert learners (p. 46–47): well developed procedures, depth of knowledge and facilitating beliefs (e.g. a strong sense of self-efficacy, that is, confidence in one’s ability to succeed and the recognition that success often comes after some frustration), productive interaction between procedures and knowledge, flexibility, adaptability, contextualisation of knowledge. Besides that, the GLL employs a range of cognitive strategies (e.g. clarification/verification, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice, and memorisation), social strategies (e.g. seeking out opportunities to use L2), affective strategies (e.g. being able to laugh at one’s own mistakes), background knowledge (e.g. knowledge of another language, or a good understanding of grammar), beliefs (e.g. it is ok to make mistakes), self-knowledge (esp. knowing one’s personal need and one’s own learning styles), procedures (e.g. problem-identification and problem-solution, selecting methods and techniques).

Lightbown and Spada (1999) point out that the model of the GLL is not without problems. If the GLL is a successful learner, then we must ask how we measure success. In his evaluation do we test grammar, comprehension, communication or all of these together? And what testing criteria do we employ?

Whilst such observations raise serious questions about the validity of the concept, the practical application is rather positive. It shows that certain attitudes and processes are beneficial in the learning of L2 even though we might not currently know precisely which ones are more important than others. We might also not know precisely what it is that the GLL does and he might not be aware of it himself. The whole theory, however, is a confirmation of what seems to be a fact – that what is essential for successful language learning is maximum learner involvement. More research, however, is needed not only in the area of studying successful learners, but perhaps also in studying why certain learners fail, and what strategies are used by unsuccessful learners.

Seminar 12 – student interaction:

1. How can teachers contribute to the development of learner autonomy? Have you experienced such strategies in your own teachers?
2. Stern (1975) listed 10 strategies (see above) used by the GLL. Assign the concepts in group B to the strategies in group A.

Group A – Stern’s strategies

1. Planning strategy
2. Active strategy
3. Empathetic strategy
4. Formal strategy
5. Experimental strategy
6. Semantic strategy

7. Practice strategy
8. Communication strategy
9. Monitoring strategy
10. Internalisation strategy

Group B

- be active in finding opportunities to use the language
- constant attempts at revising linguistic understandings
- forming the ability to think in the L2
- friendly attitude to native speakers
- learn with one's own learning style in mind
- looking for meaning
- pleasure in communicating with others
- practising the L2 as much as possible
- self-assessment
- technical know-how about languages

Solution:

1. Planning strategy (ie learn with one's own learning style in mind)
2. Active strategy (ie be active in finding opportunities to use the language)
3. Empathetic strategy (ie friendly attitude to native speakers)
4. Formal strategy (ie technical know-how about languages)
5. Experimental strategy (ie constant attempts at revising linguistic understandings)
6. Semantic strategy (ie looking for meaning)
7. Practice strategy (ie practising the L2 as much as possible)
8. Communication strategy (ie pleasure in communicating with others)
9. Monitoring strategy (ie self-assessment)
10. Internalisation strategy (ie forming the ability to think in the L2)

Seminar 12 – student presentations:

1. What Can the Good Language Learner Teach Us? (Rubin's original 1975 study)
recommended source for presentation: Rubin, J. (1975) 'What the "Good Language Learner" Can Teach Us', in TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 1975, pp. 41–51
2. Metacognition
recommended source for presentation: McGregor, D. (2007) *Developing Thinking, Developing Learning*, Ch. 10 – Development of Metacognition, Open University Press

Seminar 12 – literature:

- Brown, H. D.** (2007b) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Dörnyei, Z.** (2005) *The Psychology of the Language Learner*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
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- Harmer, J.** (2001b) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman
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- Little, D.** (2008) 'Knowledge about Language and Learner Autonomy', in May, S. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, Springer, Volume 6, pp.247–259
- Naiman, N. et al.** (1996) *The Good Language Learner*, Multilingual Matters
- Oxford, R.** (2008) 'Hero With a Thousand Faces: Learner Autonomy, Learning Strategies and Learning Tactics in Independent Language Learning', in Hurd, S. and T. Lewis (ed.) *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*, Multilingual Matters, Chapter 3, pp. 41–66

- Palfreyman, D. and R. C. Smith** (ed.) (2003) *Learner Autonomy across Cultures*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Rees-Miller, J.** (1993) 'A Critical Appraisal of Learner Training: Theoretical Bases and Teaching Implications', in *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 27, No. 4, Winter 1993, pp. 679–691
- Rubin, J.** (1975) 'What the "Good Language Learner" Can Teach Us', in *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 1975, pp. 41–51
- Rubin, J.** (2005), *The Expert Language Learner: a Review of Good Language Learner Studies and Learner Strategies*, in Johnson, K. (ed.) (2005) *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Lightbown, P. M. and N. Spada** (1999) *How Languages are Learned (Second Edition)*, Oxford University Press
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- Tennant, M.** (2003) *Psychology and Adult Learning*, Routledge

Chapter 13

Seminar 13 – The good language teacher

Aims:

- to discuss the features of the **good language teacher**.

Objectives:

The students confront their views and experience of teachers with the knowledge acquired during this course and try to identify which factors are likely to contribute to the continuing success of a language teacher.

In our discussion of the good language learner we found it was difficult to provide a suitable definition of the concept even though instinctively we all have a fairly clear conception of what features he has. Applying the label to teachers, we obtain the concept of the good language teacher (GLT), which is equally hard to define. If the good language learner is a successful learner, then the good language teacher should be a successful teacher. And to be successful, a teacher has to manage to teach, to transfer and implant knowledge and develop skills. Let us refrain from trying to find a fool-proof definition of the GLT and concentrate instead on trying to describe his features. But is the GLT somebody who simply possesses all or as many of the features we shall describe, or should his “success” be assessed by the success and concrete achievements of his students? This is not a simple question to answer: in language teaching, student performance is affected by so many factors which the teacher cannot influence (e.g. peer pressure, social background) that we cannot always correlate the skill of the teacher with the immediate success of the students.

The task at hand is not a simple one partly for the reason that there is much **confusion** resulting from the dichotomy between the instructivist and constructivist views of the teacher’s roles. Constructivists believe the explicit instruction is inefficient and that it is the learners who must construct knowledge through their own endeavours. On the other hand, instructivists insist that explicit instruction can be extremely effective if it is carried out well. We have an intuitive inclination to trust that there is at least a modicum of truth in constructivist theories as we realize that most of what we know about the world we have learnt not through direct instruction but through exploration, experience and concentrated self-study. At the same time, most of us have experienced the effects of being taught well which might be an experience for life. To be able to compare the two views and form an

opinion we must consider the roles of the language teacher. Harmer (2003) recognizes the following roles:

- controller – the teacher controls the class activities and the overall atmosphere – charismatic, inspiring and well informed teachers usually excel here;
- prompter – offering gentle help if and when it is needed;
- participant – taking part in discussions but taking care so as not to dominate the discussion;
- resource – providing answers to language-related questions;
- tutor – offering individual, tailor-made help;
- organiser – structuring the lessons (organising time and preparing activities), organising space (decorating classrooms, organising pair- or group-work and appropriate seating arrangements), organising resources (school or class library, reference books, choice of textbooks)
- performer – adopting a style of behaviour which will engage the students and attract their attention;
- partner – establishing appropriate relationship with the students (recognising and respecting their individuality, listening, being fair, treating everyone equally);
- teaching aid – being a language model, the provider of comprehensible input.

Harmer is cautious in formulating his descriptions. In his manual he advocates the encouragement of learner autonomy and recognizes constructivist trends of teachers as facilitators and learning as a learner-centred rather than a teacher-centred process, but at the same time he is aware of the need for the teacher to be more active. He refers to the performing role of the teacher, the teacher-actor option, and clearly sees it as essential but he tempers it with a discussion of its appropriateness in the light of promoting learner autonomy. His message is clear: the presence of a good teacher is felt in the classroom through his energy, managerial skills, enthusiasm and human qualities. A good teacher, however, does not allow his personality to dominate over all aspects of classroom life, a good teacher has a number of teaching styles which he skilfully chooses according to the situation.

As for direct instruction, Harmer is not opposed to direct instruction but he adds, cautiously again, that it is best when the students can arrive at the rules of the presented language themselves. Only when it is absolutely necessary should the teacher resort to providing direct explanations.

Here again we find the effect of constructivism on ELT, which was most palpable in the early stages of the development of communicative language teaching. It was driven by the belief that the learners can glean the structures they need to know from the communicative activities they perform in without being explicitly taught. But questions need to be asked here. Is direct teaching necessarily harmful and ineffective? Isn't constructivism yet another fashion trend? Is it not often quicker to say to the students directly what we want them to know and have done, rather than expect them to spend much time on figuring it out? Can we be sure that the knowledge our students construct on their own is correct, and that they are more likely to remember it?

Studies of effective teachers show that clear instruction and explanation can greatly facilitate learning. Hence, one of the key features of the GLT is that he is good at explaining and presenting. He has a store of presentation techniques that take into account the different learner styles and are well matched to the language aspects presented. The difficulty of instruction clearly matches the level and intellectual capacity of the learners. It is neither too simple nor too difficult, but within the zone of proximal development. The GLT is aware of what his students can understand and checks that the students really do understand. He is an expert on reformulation so that he easily finds other ways of presenting the same content. All of this comes from his language expertise which gives him the freedom and flexibility to choose what is appropriate and modify what is available. Yet, the GLT also recognizes the capacity of his learners to work independently and work out rules and meanings on their own when the subject matter allows. An eclectic combination of facilitator and instructor seems to be the ideal way.

Hadfield (2008:6) stresses that the GLT's approach must be balanced, and his choice of techniques not random but informed and principled. The key principles she lists include the GLT's emphasis on teaching language as communication, respecting the individuality of the learners, making learning into a positive experience, enabling learners to use their full potential (e.g. through promoting autonomy).

The notion of teaching language as communication figures high on any list of the GLT's features. It is worth noting that a good language lesson does not only teach language for communication but it is also a place where language is used communicatively. Accordingly, the GLT should strive to encourage communication by selecting suitable topics, by listening to and accepting different opinions, by creating an environment where communicating on any topic is natural.

By respecting the individuality of the learners Hadfield stresses the need for the teacher to have a sound understanding of psychology. It presupposes the ability to recognize not only different learner styles, but a general sensitivity to the various aspects of human personality. It calls for the teacher's flexibility in adapting his own teaching style to the milieu of the classroom.

Hadfield's next point (making learning into a positive experience) is best fulfilled by the teachers attitude to teaching. In my view, the good teacher's primary task is to inspire. We have seen that to learn a language largely depends on the input of the learner. To guarantee successful results, this input is usually fairly significant. It involves considerable time sacrifice and concentrated effort. And this work must largely be carried out by the learner himself. The teacher can help by making it enjoyable. He can do so through his own enthusiasm and expertise which help his students enjoy learning, through creating a highly positive classroom environment, through constantly increasing the student's motivation (especially intrinsic), and through helping students feel motivated by their own progress and successes.

Much in the make-up of the good language teacher seems to depend on his personality. An energetic teacher, passionate about his subject but capable of talking about it with humour

will not fail to interest at least some of his students. If he is equipped with patience and empathy, with the ability to praise but also to insist strictly on commitment to rules and diligent work, successful results usually follow. It would be worthwhile to research to what extent learner-beliefs regarding the qualities of the GLT match those of the teaching professionals, and whether such comparison would be culture-specific.

The GLT is passionate about his job not only for the benefit and inspiration of his students but also for his own, and for his continual enjoyment and love of his profession. The GLT enjoys thinking about teaching and creating and developing new ideas. He is committed to his job and pursues a process of life-long learning. He can do so by independent study and by partaking in the activities of teaching communities (conferences, internet forums). Through his own study he develops a vast array of techniques for the development of all language skills and forms. The GLT also works on his own language skills. This is especially important for non-native speakers who can always work on improving the standard of the language they teach. But all teachers should be passionate about the language they teach themselves and the cultures it represents and engage in reading literature about language and linguistics, history, and culture and anything related to the TL. The GLT constantly develops his own understanding of language acquisition and learning and maintains his academic focus. He studies psychology to understand how his students learn and to understand how they operate as people. He studies applied linguistics to understand about language acquisition and the relation between linguistics and the practice of using a language. He follows current events and affairs so that he can initiate, moderate and take part in interesting and topical classroom discussions. The GLT is a reflexive teacher – he constantly scrutinizes his own teaching practice with a view to evaluating what works and what does not and finding relevant reasons. The GLT has a high degree of target language awareness so that there is no end to interesting facts about the language he can present to his students. The GLT uses time efficiently – this applies to both classroom and preparation time. He develops time-saving routines for various classroom and planning procedures, but at the same time he will not spare time when he needs to analyse problematic aspects of his teaching.

The list could and should be extended beyond the several points I have made. But one important finding transpires already, namely that the GLT is not a state of being, it is not an acme beyond which lies nothing, it is a **process** of constant work and involvement, reflection and self-analysis, making and fulfilling plans. I consider it very fortunate that after decades of the preoccupation of applied linguistics with the learner, the role of the teacher in the process of language learning and acquisition is coming to the forefront of many researchers. This will no doubt have a positive impact on the quality of teacher preparation and training. Good language teachers are irreplaceable, and despite the desirability of learner autonomy and the need for the language student to “do his homework”, it is good teaching that for many students can make the difference between learner success and failure.

Seminar 13 – student interaction:

1. Which features do you consider to be the most important in the good language teacher?
2. Which of your own English teachers' qualities did you appreciate the most?

3. Did any of your own English teachers' qualities prove to be an obstacle in learning?
4. Which of the features of the GLT are subject-specific and which are the features of general effective teaching?
5. Which areas of the GLT do you feel should be scrutinized by professional research?
6. How important do you feel it is for a language teacher to be an expert user of the TL?
7. What are the distinctions between native and non-native language teachers? Are there any advantages in being one or the other?

Seminar 13 – student presentation:

How do teachers prevent students from learning? (thoughts on “the Bad Language Teacher”)

Seminar 13 – literature:

- Anderman, E. et al. (2009) *Psychology of Classroom Learning*, Macmillan Reference USA
- Brown, H. D. (2007a) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Brown, H. D. (2007b) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)*, Pearson Education Ltd
- Candlin, C. and N. Mercer (ed.) (2001) *English Language Teaching in its Social Context*, Routledge
- Clarke, M. (2008) *Language Teacher Identities, Multilingual Matters*
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- Coleman, J. A. and J. Klapper (2005) *Effective Learning and Teaching in Modern Languages*, Routledge
- Dunne, R. and T. Wragg (1994) *Effective Teaching*, Routledge
- Hadfield, J. & C. (2008) *Introduction to Teaching English*, Oxford University Press
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- Johnson, K. (ed.) (2005) *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003) *Beyond Methods, Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*, Yale University Press
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- Nunan, D. (1990) *Language Teaching Methodology*, Prentice Hall International
- Pachler, N. and K. Field (2002) *Learning to Teach Modern Foreign Languages in the Secondary School*, Routledge
- Richards, J. C. and Ch. Lockhart (2007) *Reflective Teaching in the Second Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press
- Saha, L.J. and A.G. Dworkin (2009) *International Handbook Of Research On Teachers And Teaching*, Springer
- Scrivener, J. (2005) *Learning Teaching*, Macmillan
- Swarbrick, A. (ed.) (1994) *Teaching Modern Languages*, Routledge

Chapter 14

Seminar 14 – Language textbooks

Aims:

- to provide an overview of **textbook typology**;
- to present criteria for textbook **selection** and **evaluation**;
- to introduce basic principles of **working with textbooks** in the language classroom.

Objectives:

The students gain theoretical knowledge of textbooks, learn to understand the approaches to their classification and evaluation. They receive concrete guidelines and tips for the use of textbooks in the language classroom.

The eminent Czech educationalist Jan Průcha explains the functioning of textbooks by analysing the interrelated nature of the following three functional perspectives:

- textbooks as curricular projects;
- textbooks as sources of information and content for the student; and
- textbooks as didactic tools for teachers. (Průcha 2009: 272)

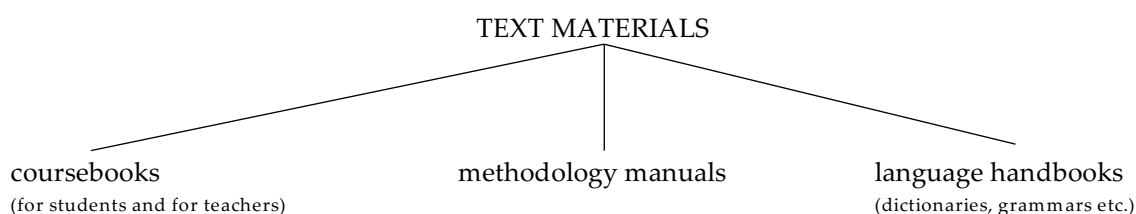
Průcha works with the assumption that a textbook is not only a curricular project but also its projection – he sees a textbook as an expression of curricular needs and specifications. Yet, this is currently one of the areas in which contemporary school reality in the Czech Republic is in stark contrast with. At least as far as language textbooks are concerned. Schools have long been given free rein in the selection of language textbooks. Consequently, their decisions may be based on subjective or questionable criteria; they are also frequently influenced by business initiatives of publishers. The situation has been further blurred by the abolishment of common standards in language education (e.g. in the form of a national syllabus) and the non-existence of a national language policy. On the other hand, the concept of a new standardized school-leaving exam (Nová maturita) has been launched, which forces schools to adopt a product-driven approach to teaching (where they are supposed to teach for the final exam without being told precisely how) instead of a process-driven one (where teaching happens strictly in accordance with the latest research-based findings). Of course, these two approaches do not necessarily contradict each other, but if they are to be truly complementary as they could or perhaps should be, a common policy ought to exist.

In the absence of such a policy, the approach, method and procedures are frequently defined by the textbooks in use. The approach and method form the basis of the writing process, the writing philosophy of the authors, whilst the procedures and techniques conform to the method in the format of the presentation of the new language and the way in which it is practised.

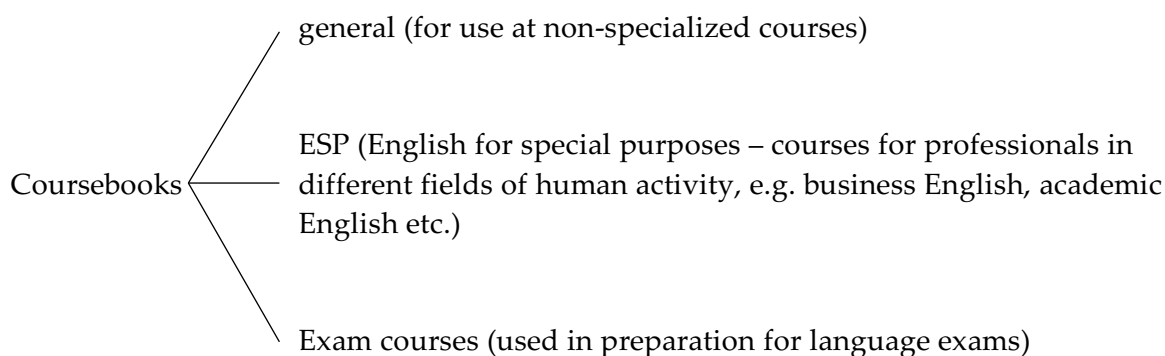
Průcha (2009: 274) mentions the close connection of textbooks with ideological and political principles of the countries of origin. He also stresses the role of textbooks in presenting “the sources of attitudes and preconceptions regarding ethnicity, race, religion etc.” Průcha is referring here to the ethical dimension of textbooks, the fact that textbooks do not only present information but that they also educate. And it is this quality which should be taken into account in the first place when teachers and schools are choosing new textbooks for class use.

14.1. Language textbook typology

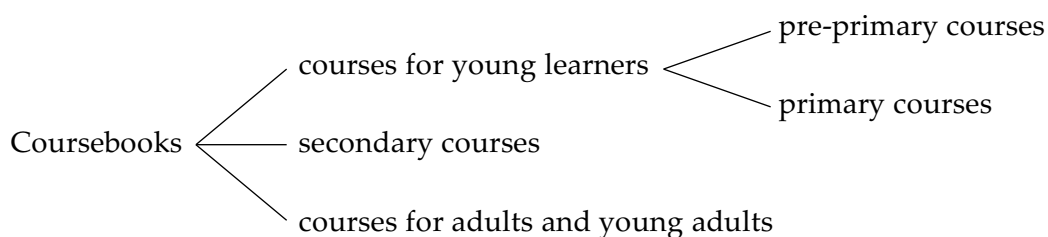
Průcha suggests the following typology of language textbooks.



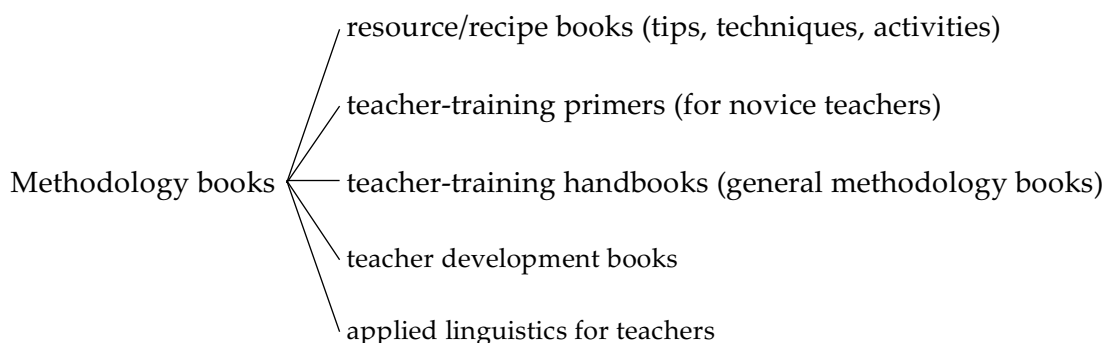
General coursebooks are intended for use in the classrooms, and typically contain practice in all language forms and skills, a variety of activities and presentations of new language material (grammar, vocabulary, usage etc.). They are usually published as a set of student’s books, teacher’s books and workbooks. Teacher’s books contain methodological notes; ideas, tips and suggestions for teaching with the coursebook; recording transcriptions; and keys to exercises. Workbooks are designed as source of extra practice activities, and are often used for setting homework assignments and self-study. There are also specialist coursebooks used in exam or ESP (English for special purposes) classes. General coursebooks are typically divided according to age and/or level of proficiency¹.



¹ We leave aside the division based on the variety of English being taught (British, American, Australian, Global English).



Methodology books fall into several categories. The most popular ones with teachers are the so-called recipe or **resource books**² which contain ideas for activities, techniques and games for various classroom settings, ages and levels of proficiency, and for a variety of language skills and forms. These techniques form the basic repertoire of any language teacher, and add energy and creativity to the classroom routine. Teacher training primers³ are introductory textbooks of language teaching for the novice teachers. They discuss basic concepts of language learning and teaching, and introduce a selection of practical tips and classroom techniques. There also exist more advanced general handbooks for teacher training (teacher training handbooks⁴). There is a vast choice of specialized research based publications both for the less experienced teacher-reader (teacher development books⁵) and for the experienced teacher-reader or researcher (applied linguistics for teachers⁶).



The third big group of language materials consists of various **language handbooks**. These are, for example, books for the development of language skills, language forms and reference books.

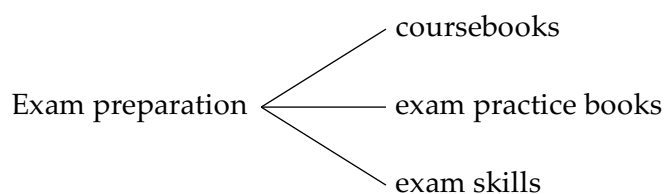
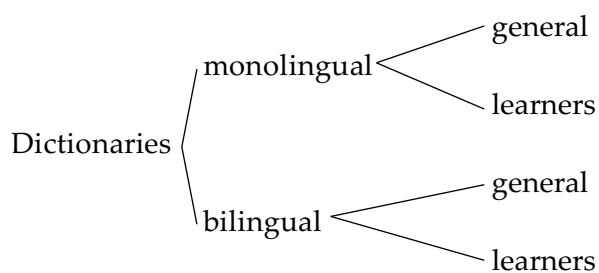
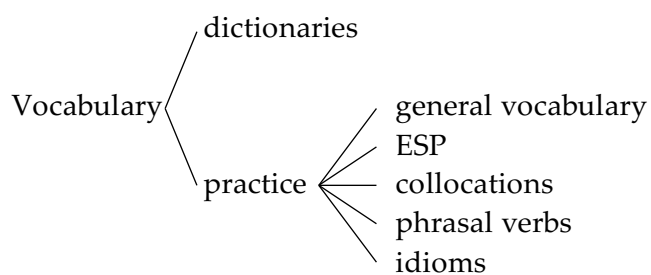
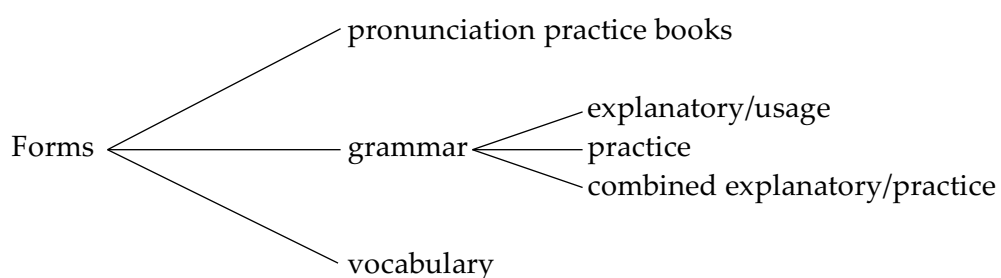
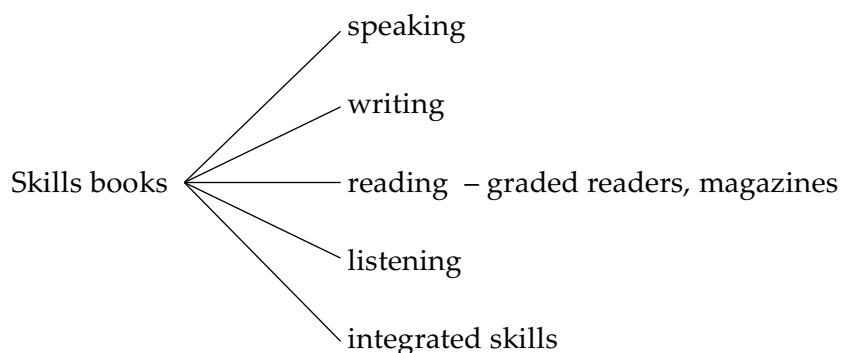
² For example, the series *Cambridge Handbooks for Teachers* and *Oxford English Resource Books for Teachers*.

³ For example, Harmer, J. (2007) *How to Teach English*, Longman or Ur, P. (1996) *A Course in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press

⁴ For example, Harmer, J. (2007) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman or Scrivener, J. (2011) *Learning Teaching*, MacMillan Books for Teachers

⁵ For example, the series *Cambridge Language Teaching Library* or *Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers*.

⁶ For example, the series *Cambridge Applied Linguistics* or *Oxford Applied Linguistics*.



The breathtaking range of materials and the numbers of concrete publications attests to a significant fact: publishing language textbooks, and especially in the domain of ELT, is an

enormous global enterprise which generates considerable revenue. On the inside front cover of its 2011 catalogue, Oxford University Press boasts that “*Every minute, 5 people in the world buy **Headway** material.*” (bold text as in the original). Let us do some simple maths – that is 7,200 Headway titles every day. At the average price of 400 crowns, this generates 2.88 million crowns every day, or the staggering 1.05 billion crowns a year. And this is just Headways.

Textbooks can be classified according to provenance (English- and non-English speaking countries), or more accurately into monolingual and bilingual publications. Monolingual materials were originally written for international classes taking place in English-speaking countries, where the only language of communication between the students and with the teacher was English. However, as most language teaching happens in bilingual environments, traditionally this used to be the realm of local publishers. However, since the era of the Direct Method bilingual publications have been frowned upon in certain branches of ELT, but they never lost their attractiveness to both students and teachers. Students regularly commented they desired to purchase books in which the new linguistic material, be it lexis or grammar, was presented in their mother tongue, as it facilitated comprehension⁷ and maximized the books’ potential as self-study materials. Likewise, teachers can rely on the students’ independent work and self-study, and they are granted one of the most natural tools for their work, the shared mother tongue. If used judiciously, this is an extremely potent tool – quick explanations and translations can save precious classroom time whilst providing a guarantee that students understand – where explanations are necessary – what is being explained. International publishers gradually awoke to the fact that they could not displace local publications, and these day most monolingual books are available with a supplement containing translated word-lists and grammar explanations. Whilst these supplements are useful to the students, they are still predominantly just translations of the original English texts which have not been written for the speakers of a specific L1. Useful comparisons of differences and similarities between the L1 and L2 are thus left out.

14.2 Textbook evaluation and criteria for selecting textbooks

The natural tendency of many teachers undertaking the process of textbook evaluation and selection is to make a quick judgement, forming an almost instant “impressionistic overview” (Cunningsworth 2002:1). First impressions can be rather misleading in this area, especially as there appear to be so many factors which must be taken into account here that the process is a rather lengthy one.

In the first place, a thorough needs analysis must be carried out. A needs analysis is a process of establishing the students’ “lacks, wants and necessities” (Nation and Macalister

⁷ Comenius in his *Didactica Magna* assigned communicative features to textbooks. He insisted that textbooks should be easily understandable and accessible to the student, and that they should be written in the form of a dialogue. How far these basic ideas are from such books in which the target language is presented by means of the target language. Once purchased, they can be used in the language classroom but not so readily at home for self-study.

2010:24). In other words, what the students know and what they do not know, what they desire to know, and what they are required to know. The results of needs analysis constitute some of the factors that affect the choice. They are especially age, level of proficiency, required knowledge (exams etc.), professional bias (ESP), and personal preferences. The teacher should also carry out a teacher's needs analysis to see how the material can improve his ability to respond to the requirements of each particular student, and the teaching context. At this stage, the selection proper may start, the matching of needs with available options.

Once a title has been pre-selected, we carry out a "physical" evaluation. Criteria for this complex process have been suggested by several authors. Especially Grant (1995) and Cunningsworth (2002) are useful here. Grant suggests a three-stage process of textbook evaluation: 1) initial evaluation; 2) detailed evaluation; and 3) in-use evaluation. The *initial evaluation* is to be based on a set of criteria summed up in an acronym CATALYST, where C stands for communicativeness, A for aims (e.g. official requirements), T for teachability (user-friendliness), A for available add-ons (teacher's books, CDs, multimedia support), L for level (matching the student's level of proficiency), Y for (y)our overall impression, S for student's overall impression, and T for the fact whether the book has been tried and tested.

Grant also designed a set of three questionnaires for teachers (see Appendix 2). In the first one of them ("Does the book suit your students?"), he invites the teachers to consider the book from the students' point of view, trying to judge the book's physical appeal, and the way it corresponds with the age of the students, its cultural acceptability, its length and difficulty, its authenticity, the balance between theoretical and practical knowledge, the degree to which various skills are integrated, and whether the book leads the students through communicative activities to independent use. In the second part ("Does the book suit the teacher?"), the teachers are to evaluate the material from their own perspective, concentrating on the contents and layout of the course, the quality of the teacher's book, the suitability for the given teaching situation, the ease of use and the ease of adaptability to the specific needs, the amount of pre-lesson preparation, the existence and nature of ancillary materials (incl. tests, revision, recordings, workbooks, visuals), the application of the spiral approach (the regular recycling of items), and also the fact whether the book is appropriate for the other teachers at the school. In the third one ("Does the textbook suit the syllabus and examination?") the teachers are to pay attention to the fulfilment of curricular and other official requirements such as adherence to official syllabi, systematicity, usability as exam preparation both in terms of explanation, practice, and coverage of exam techniques.

Cunningsworth's (2002) evaluation criteria are by far the most detailed; they are divided into sections according to skills and forms, but he also includes advice on assessing the treatment of such issues as style and appropriateness, and cultural considerations.

In an early edition of *The Practice of ELT* (1983), Harmer enumerates several criteria for textbook selection, and yet in the latest edition (2007) he does not include any at all. The coursebook receives a mere two pages. And Scrivener in *Learning Teaching* (1994, 2009)

avoids the topic of coursebooks entirely. Harmer explains that coursebooks are primarily “springboards” (2007:182) for lessons rather than manuals “to be slavishly followed”, and he gives some basic advice on adapting coursebook materials (by omitting, replacing or changing the included materials). This approach has no doubt arisen from the realisation that an ideal textbook cannot be found, and that textbook selection is a highly individual matter, one which combines criteria imposed by the learner, teacher and the teaching context. As Grant (1987) puts it “the perfect textbook as such does not exist” but owing to the vast choice on the market “there is a best book available for every teacher and their learners”. Criteria such as the above mentioned (Grant and Cunningsworth) provide a useful framework for considering the various factors, but common sense and a carefully evaluated needs analysis are as important. Another factor of extreme importance is the ease with which the book lends itself to lesson planning. As Průcha points out (2009:293) “textbooks are possibly the main source which teachers use for planning their classes”. Given the typical workload of a school teacher, well-structured textbooks, whose contents are easily converted into lessons, can be highly time-effective.

14.3. Using textbooks

Using textbooks effectively and appropriately is one of the biggest challenges of language teaching. Every student is different, and so is every class. The inexperienced – or the unaware – teacher may feel hemmed in by the style and sequence of the textbook and neglect the creative side of teaching and the essential individual approach to his pupils. Over time, this can easily result in the lessons’ becoming boring and the students’ losing their motivation. Likewise, over a certain period of time the teacher can become bored and unmotivated himself. Tice (1991) calls this the methodological straightjacket. And yet, coursebooks frequently offer a high level of sophistication in the structure of the syllabus, the manner of presentation of new material and its recycling, and in the vast array of activities and topics. What can teachers do to avoid the above-mentioned pitfalls and make the most of the coursebooks’ strong points? Detailed knowledge of the textbook, its critical evaluation and flexible use are the keys to success.

Know your textbook

A detailed analysis of the coursebook is an essential prerequisite for its successful deployment. This involves both the pre-use analysis (the teacher’s familiarization with the book), and the in-use evaluation. The latter is especially important – the teacher should reflect on the quality of the deployment of the textbook, identify the cause of shortcomings and strengths. He should annotate the book for his own future use and reflection, developing a system for noting the quality and effectivity of the individual activities. He should familiarize himself with the intentions of the author(s) which are commonly stated in the teacher’s books.

Critically evaluate and be flexible

If an activity falls flat the teacher should identify the reasons. These may have been of a personal nature (teacher- or student-induced) or they might be inherent in the material itself. If it is the latter, the teacher should either adapt or omit the activity, replace it with a different one, and make note of it all in the book itself. Similarly, any activities or

resources deemed inappropriate for the given class should be adapted or omitted. A coursebook should be seen primarily as a source book⁸ which helps the teacher but which does not tie him down. It should be only one of the many tools available to and possessed by the teacher, besides an array of authentic written and recorded texts, videos, visual materials, poems and songs, games, quizzes and competitions, and last but not least a variety of materials for formal practice.

After this brief survey of some of the topics connected with language textbooks, one cannot help wondering about their future. Without trying to be a prophet, one can clearly see that there is always going to be the need for them – they are essential for the learner, and they can greatly simplify the teacher's work. The question remains, to what extent the format, or the medium will change. We appear to be witnessing a gradual decline of the printed media. The market with electronic books is booming. Technology most probably holds the answer here. Language textbooks over the decades have become increasingly sophisticated, displaying features such as coloured photographs, accompanying workbooks and practice books, CDs, DVDs, mp3s, software applications, all of which make the final product often excessively costly. One can easily imagine that all of these features could, however, be built into one gadget, probably in the form of a tablet computer or even a mobile telephone. Such an appliance would in one highly portable piece of equipment combine the features of a classic textbook with the latest technological achievements along with video sketches and internet support for collaborative learning, and taking into account the findings of neuro-linguistic approaches to learning. This would challenge the language teacher to guide his students towards an effective use of such devices. The biggest challenge for the industry will be the never-ending battle with piracy, which will have an unfortunate effect on the final cost of any such product. In the years to come, schools will carry on with traditional textbooks, but teachers will have to respond to the technological pressures put on them by the industry and by the students and/or their parents. Both by adopting what is practicable, and by rejecting what is counterproductive. As the implementation of technology into classrooms is costly, and it also requires specialist training for the teachers, we will need more research into the effectiveness of technology-driven approaches to decide whether the expense and time commitment are worthwhile, and whether the traditional, paper textbook is definitely a thing of the past.

Seminar 14 – student interaction

1. What is your experience of language teaching textbooks? Discuss your experience both as a student and as a teacher.
2. Describe the structure of a textbook you are familiar with. What are its strong and weak points?
3. Describe different way in which teachers can use textbooks with their students. How do you believe textbooks should be used in the language classroom?
4. What are the different types of textbooks you have seen? What do you consider to be the latest trend in ELT publishing?
5. Discuss the topic of textbook as a market commodity.

⁸ Interestingly, the two words are anagrams.

Seminar 14 – student presentation:

1. Prepare a portrait of a major ELT publishing house and provide an overview of their ELT publications.
2. The textbook of the years to come. How do you see the future of language textbooks? Is the paper textbook dead? What are its alternatives, and how could they be developed to ensure effective learning?

Seminar 14 – Literature:

Cunningsworth, A. (2002) *Choosing Your Coursebook*, Macmillan

Grant, N. (1995) *Making the Most of Your Textbook*, Longman

Hall, D. R. and A. Hewings (2001) *Innovation in English Language Teaching*, Routledge

Knapp, K. and B. Seidlhofer (ed.) (2009) *Handbook of Foreign Language Communication and Learning*, Mouton de Gruyter

Nation, I. S. P. and Macalister, J. (2010) *Language Curriculum Design*, Routledge

Průcha, J. (1998) *Učebnice: teorie a analýzy edukačního média*, Příručka pro studenty, učitele, autory učebnic a výzkumné pracovníky, Paido

Průcha, J. (2009) *Moderní pedagogika*, Portál

Tomlinson, B. (ed.) *English Language Learning Materials*, Continuum

Shrnutí

Cílem rigorózní práce je vytvoření portfolia pro jednosemestrální kurz Didaktická propedeutika pro studenty angličtiny na FF UK. Tento přípravný kurz didaktiky by měl sloužit jako úvod do předmětu pro budoucí učitele angličtiny na středních školách, kterým by měl poskytnout teoretické obeznámení s obecnými principy učení, jazykové akvizice a učení se cizím jazykům.

Jednotlivé kapitoly rigorózní práce popisují obsah vlastních seminářů. Dále uvádějí seznam literatury k probíraným tématům a návrhy možných studentských prezentací a otázek k diskusi a dalšímu studiu.

V úvodním semináři (Kapitola 1) se studenti seznámí se základními pojmy a koncepty, se kterými se v kurzu postupně pracuje. Nejprve je pozornost věnována debatě o **definici jazyka** z pohledu učitele a studenta, neboť právě vlastní chápání podstaty jazyka často ovlivňuje způsob, jakým učitelé přistupují k výuce. Akcent je kladen nejen na chápání jazyka jako systému systémů v pohybu, ale i na jeho symbolickou a sociální dimenzi. Součástí diskuse je i Vygotského chápání jazyka jako nástroje myšlení a předávání vědění. V semináři je dále vymezen popis oboru **aplikovaná lingvistika** a oborů, které pod toto označení spadají. Dále je poskytnuta základní definice **učení** a model **učení se jazykům**. V diskusi se studenti zaměří na postižení rozdílu mezi druhým a cizím jazykem, cílenému učení a jazykové akvizice. Seminář předjímá téma osobnosti studenta detailně analyzované v pozdějších seminářích tím, že uvádí debatu o lingvistické identitě a studentově chápání vlastního ega v kontextu cizího jazyka a různých pohledech na to, jak znalost jazyka ovlivňuje lidské myšlení (Sapir, Whorf, Lakoff, Boroditsky, Slobin et al.).

Druhý seminář vychází z poznatku, že způsob, jakým učitelé vyučují je hluboce ovlivněn jejich představami o tom, jak se lidé učí. Seminář poskytuje úvod do psychologie učení a jeho vývoje ve 20. století. Studenti se postupně seznamují s přístupy behaviorální, gestaltistické a kognitivistické psychologie. V praktické části semináře se zaměří na zhodnocení vlivu jednotlivých psychologických směrů na metody a techniky jazykové výuky. Dále je zhodnocen přístup konstruktivismu a sociálního konstruktivismu, které spolu s kognitivismem měly významný vliv na formování komunikativních přístupů k jazykové výuce a výuce zaměřené na studenta (*learner-centred teaching*). Studenti se seznámí s Vygotského konceptem zóny nejbližšího vývoje a technikami podpory ze strany učitele (*scaffolding*) při výuce jazyků.

Tématem třetího semináře je osvojování mateřského jazyka. Studenti se seznámí s příslušnými teoriemi behaviorismu, nativismu, konekcionismu, emergentismu a interaktivismu a s pojmem kritického období v osvojování jazyka. Dále jsou popsána vývojová stadia při osvojování angličtiny dítětem a popsán vliv kontaktu dítěte s jazykem matky a mluvčích v jeho okolí. Všechny poznatky jsou v diskusi srovnány s akvizicí cizího jazyka. Poukázáno je pak především na podstatné rozdíly v obou procesech a možné praktické dopady na jazykovou výuku.

Ve čtvrtém semináři jsou popsány teorie jazykové akvizice druhého a cizího jazyka, a to v chronologickém sledu počínaje behavioristickými teoriemi (kontrastivní analýza) a konče dialogickou teorií jako jedním z posledních vývojových směrů. Dále jsou uvedeny teorie kognitivistické (např. analýza chyb a hypotéza identity), teorie Krashenovy (podvědomé osvojování), a Longova interakční teorie. V diskusi jsou poznatky konfrontovány s problematikou osvojování mateřštiny. Diskuse dále vede k analýze vlivu teorií jazykové akvizice na jazykovou výuku obecně i v jednotlivých vývojových obdobích.

Pátý a šestý seminář uvádí studenty do problematiky kognitivních a afektivních činitelů. Předmětem diskuse jsou následující proměnné:

- věk (diskuse se zaměří především na debatu o kritickém období pro osvojení cizího jazyka a na postižení rozdílů v přístupu k učení v různých věkových skupinách);
- vliv pohlaví na přístup k učení a možné strategie výuky;
- jazykové nadání (studenti se seznámí s metodikou testování jazykového nadání);
- inteligence;
- motivace (typy motivace, způsoby práce s motivací);
- afektivní filtr (úzkost, ochota komunikovat);
- kognitivní styly a Gardnerova teorie multidimenzionální inteligence a možnosti jejich využití při výuce jazyků;
- vlastní představy studentů o cizím jazyce a učení se jazykům (*learner beliefs*).

Sedmý seminář poskytuje základní informace z oboru neurolingvistiky. Studenti se seznámí s poznatky o jazykových centrech v mozku a metodách jejich výzkumu. Zmíněna je i problematika lateralizace mozku a možnosti využití skutečnosti, že obzvláště v raných fázích studia cizího jazyka je silně zapojena pravá mozková hemisféra. V praktické části semináře jsou představeny možné techniky podporující aktivaci pravé hemisféry a reflektující poznatky o dominantní hemisféře. Druhá část semináře je zaměřena na popis funkce paměti a jejích jednotlivých typů. V praktické části jsou pak analyzovány techniky práce s pamětí a nejrůznější memorizační techniky a pomůcky.

Předmětem osmého semináře je historický přehled vývojových trendů metod výuky cizích jazyků. Studenti jsou nejprve obeznámeni s vývojem pohledů na definici metody a metodologie, přístupů a technik. Dále je uveden stručný nástin hlavních rysů následujících metod: gramaticko-překladová metoda, přímá metoda, audio-lingvní metoda, Community Language-Learning, sugestopedie, Total Physical Response, Silent Way, komunikativní přístup, přirozený přístup, task-based learning a lexikální přístup. V rámci

diskuze je probráno možné využití typických technik té které metody. Důraz je kladen na eklektické využití dostupných technik a přístupů a využití poznatků tzv. *post-method pedagogy*.

Cílem devátého semináře je přehled problematiky vývojových fází mezijazyka. Představena je definice mezijazyka a jeho dimenze (systematičnost, variabilita, dynamičnost, redukovanosť), pojem pozitivní a negativní jazykové interference, pojmy *input*, *intake* a *output* a koncept fosilizace. Toto slouží jako úvod k diskusi o jazykových chybách, jejich analýze a příčinách. Studenti jsou vedeni k zamyšlení nad možnými postoji učitele k chybám (diskuse o tom, jaké chyby opravovat, jaké ignorovat a proč) a metodám jejich opravování. V druhé části semináře je představeno tradiční dělení jazykového učiva na jazykové prostředky (slovní zásoba, výslovnost, pravopis, gramatika, jazykové funkce) a řečové dovednosti (čtení, poslech, mluvení, psaní a překlad).

Desátý seminář má dvě hlavní témata – komunikační a jazykovou kompetenci. Úvodem je zmíněn Chomského koncept jazykové kompetence a performance, Hymesův model komunikační a sociolinguistické kompetence a rozdělení kompetencí na gramatické, sociolinguistické, diskurzní a strategické, jak ho představili autoři Canale a Swain. V druhé části semináře je analyzován pojem pokročilosti a způsoby stanovení různých úrovní pokročilosti. V této souvislosti je uveden model úrovní pokročilosti vyvinutý asociací ALTE, detailně je pak prodebatován *Společný evropský referenční rámec pro jazyky* včetně kritického pohledu na některé aspekty jeho implementace. V debatě studenti diskutují o rozdílných přístupech učitele ke studentům různé pokročilosti a hodnotí využití a dopad Evropského referenčního rámce z hlediska učitele, studenta a vydavatele.

Tématy jedenáctého semináře jsou strategie, které využívá student jazyka. Rozděluje se na komunikační (kompenzační) a studijní. Komunikační strategie umožňují překonávat problémy v komunikaci (chybějící slovní zásoba, nejistota ohledně správné formy atp.). V debatě studenti zhodnotí, jaké komunikační strategie má student k dispozici a jakými prostředky může učitel podpořit jejich užívání. Studijní strategie jsou techniky, postupy a přístupy, které student využívá při studiu jazyka. Seminář vychází z taxonomie strategií podle Oxfordové a konfrontuje ho s přístupem jiných autorů. Studenti se zamýšlejí nad tím, které faktory ovlivňují studentovu volbu adekvátních strategií, seznamují se s konkrétními technikami a debatují o možnostech praktické výuky studijním strategiím.

Dvanáctý seminář úzce navazuje na témata předchozího semináře a uvádí velice aktuální téma autonomie studenta jako ideálu moderního pohledu na vzdělání. Vedení k autonomii je odrazem rozvoje výuky zaměřené na žáka a na jeho osobnostní charakteristiky tak, jak byly uvedeny v průběhu kurzu a jejím cílem je výchova studentů, kteří v úzké spolupráci s učiteli přijímají odpovědnost za vlastní studium. V semináři se studenti zamýšlejí nad technikami, které může učitel využít k rozvoji autonomie studentů a analyzují pohled na autonomii jako na výzvu celého vzdělávacího systému. V semináři se studenti dále seznámí s koncepcí „good language learner“, jejíž podstatou je identifikace praktik úspěšných studentů jazyků a debatují, zda je možné tyto poznatky předat i méně úspěšným studentům.

Třináctý seminář je zamyšlením nad koncepcí “good language teacher”, tedy úspěšného učitele jazyků. Zamýšlí se nad tím, má-li učitel být spíše instruktivistou nebo konstruktivistou a zkoumáním učitelových rolí se pokouší nalézt vhodnou rovnováhu mezi oběma přístupy. Zdůrazňuje důležitost učitelovy energie, schopnosti motivovat a inspirovat vlastním nadšením a znalostmi, ale i lidskými kvalitami. Dobrý učitel umí dobře vysvětlovat a prezentovat látku, chápe jazyk jako komunikaci a ne jako jazykové cvičení, je dobrým psychologem. Dobrý učitel má zájem stále se zdokonalovat v jazyce, který vyučuje, i ve vlastním učení. Dobrý učitel není metou či stupněm vývoje, ale stavem, jehož setrvání závisí na trvalé práci a oddanosti oboru. V rámci diskuse v semináři studenti debatují o vlastních zkušenostech s učiteli jazyků a hodnotí, co považují za přínosné, kvalitní a efektivní a co naopak považují za kontraproduktivní. Cílem tohoto semináře a vlastně i celého kurzu Didaktické propedeutiky je podnítit zájem studentů o profesi jazykového učitele a motivovat je k neustávající práci na vybudování a udržování vysokého standardu, tak aby jejich učitelská praxe byla přínosná a příkladná pro studenty a zároveň naplňovala vlastní potřeby učitelů nalézt uspokojení v zaměstnání a pocit konání smysluplné a svrchovaně důležité práce – naplňování poslání učitele.

Práci završuje ještě čtrnáctá kapitola, která se zabývá úvodem do problematiky jazykových učebnic. Představuje jejich typologii, kritéria pro výběr a hodnocení učebnic a stručný nástin zásad práce s učebnicí. Samotný seminář je pak doplněn o praktické ukázky (učebnic i práce s nimi), jejichž popis není součástí této rigorózní práce.

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